

President Roh Moo-hyun and the New Politics of South Korea

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The 2002 Presidential Election

On election night December 19, 2002, as Roh Moo-hyun, the liberal candidate of South Korea's governing Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) appeared to have won the presidency, tens of thousands of young people began to gather in central Seoul at Gwanghwamoon Square. This young generation that filled the square, the new meeting place for citizens to express national pride, had done so in June during the 2002 World Cup and in December during the candlelight vigils for two schoolgirls accidentally killed by U.S. military vehicles. This time, their support overwhelmingly favored the election victor. In a couple of hours, they filled the spacious square, a feat made possible by their voluntarism and their access to mobile and cyber communications.

The 2002 presidential election was the second milestone election in the history of this young democracy. The first milestone occurred in 1987, the year South Korea became a democracy. The 1987 election helped solidify electoral choice and party competition along regional lines, a pattern that dominated South Korean politics for the next fifteen years. In the 2002 election, ideology supplanted regional rivalry, and a new politics arrived on the Korean scene. Roh Moo-hyun represented liberals, favoring economic equality and a more autonomous foreign policy than before, whereas Roh's rival, Lee Hoi-Chang of the Grand National Party (GNP), stood for conservatives.

The elevation of ideology was, and is, part and parcel of the new politics. Rejecting traditional liberal and conservative visions of society, advocates of new politics called for a new way of doing things. Like the enfants terribles in the Western democracies of the 1960s, young voters demanded new political values. They favored more direct and participatory democracy through demonstrations,

online debates, and Internet voting in addition to representative democracy by elections and political parties. They also argued for more decentralized decision-making in the workplace, at school, and in other social organizations. They opposed traditional values such as social hierarchy, government authority, and regionalism, which had dominated South Korean politics for much of its modern era.

Roh secured the victory by 2.3 percent of the vote, surpassing his opponent on both the ideological and the larger new political fronts. On the ideological front, Roh attracted more moderate voters than Lee (who obtained 46.6 percent of the vote) with a remarkable drive for ideological moderation over the course of his campaign. For instance, during a televised debate he rejected leftist candidate Kwon Young-Kil's proposal that he sign a statement asking for the amendment of the highly publicized Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between South Korea and the United States. To downplay his image as a staunch nationalist, Roh promised to build a more favorable environment for foreign investors. In sharp contrast, Lee Hoi-chang stuck to his conservative stance for almost the entire election year. His last-minute gestures in December toward moderation were interpreted as misplaced flattery and generated distrust among the voting public.

On the new political front, too, Roh outmaneuvered Lee by demonstrating much more sympathy for and understanding of the new generation. Relatively young at 56, his populist image and credentials as a reformer allowed him to ride the wave in favor of change, anti-authoritarianism, and national pride. In comparison, Lee was neither sensitive nor shrewd enough in his methods to accommodate these new social trends.

The Candidates

In the storybook sense, it would be difficult to find a more perfect pair of antagonists than Roh and Lee. From personal background and style to ideological stance and professional career, the two main contenders for the presidency were polar opposites. Son of a peasant, Roh worked his way from political obscurity to presidential office. Without a college degree, he passed the bar and became a lawyer at the age of 29. He was actively involved in the democratization movement as a labor lawyer in the city of Busan until he entered the National Assembly in 1988. He stubbornly fought against regionalism. He sought reelection in the Kyungsang region while still a member of the Cholla regional party, archival of the Kyungsang regional party. He spent many more years outside the National Assembly hall than inside during the 1990s. Through these years, Roh developed into an icon of the masses, a man with a low-key style and liberal vision of politics and the economy.

In contrast, Lee Hoi-chang was raised, as the son of a lawyer, on the right side of the tracks. Lee became a lawyer too, and etched out a remarkable career for himself: Supreme Court Judge, Chairman of the National Auditing and Inspection Office, Prime Minister, and presidential candidate of the governing party are all positions on his curriculum vitae. Before losing the 2002 election, the only blemish he carried was his failed bid for the presidency in 1997. Lee has sustained his conservative political and economic views. In 2002, his long career as a judge and his brief political experience made him look stiff and aloof to voters.

For the first time in South Korea's short history of fair and democratic elections, the 2002 election provided voters with a distinct choice between liberal and conservative policy programs. Previous elections saw

South Korea's notorious "three Kims" (President Kim Dae-jung, former president Kim Young-sam, and longstanding United Liberal Democratic Party leader Kim Jong-pil) relying heavily upon charismatic appeal to their regional bases. Neither Roh nor Lee had such a luxury this time around. Instead, both were left with little choice but to use policy packages to attract voters. What came out of those packages were alternative perceptions of and solutions for problems of economic management, social welfare, reunification with the North, and foreign policy.

Roh endorsed a more active role for government in the economy, especially in ameliorating economic inequality and providing social safety nets for the lower class. In particular, he was in favor of expanding social assistance programs and reducing income taxes for the lower-middle and lower classes. He also promised to provide public housing for half-a-million families during his tenure. His election manifesto opposed the reduction of corporate taxes and emphasized the need for drastic reform of corporate governance among Korea's family-owned conglomerates, or chaebols.

In contrast, Lee Hoi-chang stressed minimizing government's role in the economy and letting the "invisible hand of the market" do its work to correct social and economic injustice. State provision of social safety nets to alleviate income inequality should not be further expanded, according to Lee. His election program highlighted job creation rather than funding for the unemployed and underlined financial and corporate restructuring toward a sound market economy.

But the hottest dichotomy came in the form of foreign policy issues. Here the two candidates showed yet more striking differences. Where each man stood on North Korea and the ROK-U.S. alliance became the two most salient campaign issues. Roh dem-

onstrated nationalistic leanings, whereas Lee favored close cooperation with the United States in dealing with North Korea. While emphasizing the significance of the ROK-U.S. alliance, Roh endorsed the continuation of the Sunshine policy, the controversial engagement policy initiated by President Kim Dae-jung despite North Korea's habit of raising tensions on the peninsula from time to time. With its determined soft stance toward a disobedient North Korea, the Sunshine policy has occasionally strained the ROK-U.S. alliance. Contrary to this approach, Lee supported a policy toward the North based on the principles of transparency and reciprocity. In Lee's eyes, economic aid and energy assistance to North Korea should be closely related to the inspection of nuclear programs and other military issues.

Given the liberal-conservative contest, moderation seemed the best way to attract undecided voters. As it turned out, the best track to the Blue House, Korea's presidential residence, was in fact an election strategy that sought a middle path. Such a drive inevitably involves a trade-off between gains in the middle and losses in the backyard. When Roh made steps toward a moderate path in June 2002, his popularity plummeted to below 20 percent. This drop is largely attributed to corruption scandals in Kim Dae-jung's government at that time. Yet eventually Roh's drive for moderation turned out to be more consistent and convincing to undecided voters than Lee's abrupt U-turn late in the campaign. Lee was on cruise control after having taken a comfortable lead in opinion polls over the summer. Only after Roh Moo-hyun formed a surprising coalition with a third presidential candidate, Chung Mong-joon, in late November, did Lee turn the wheel and hit the accelerator toward the political middle, a maneuver that made him look inconsistent and insincere.

Until late November, Chung Mong-joon's candidacy had a powerful effect on the competition. Chung, the Korean Soccer League Commissioner and a member of the Hyundai conglomerate family, had sat in second place in opinion polls. The soccer team's miraculous fourth-place finish in the 2002 World Cup made Chung a national hero. But given his strikingly different background and policies, a coalition with Roh was considered highly unlikely by most election watchers. Yet Roh and Chung agreed to present a unified candidacy, and they held opinion polls to determine whose name should be on the ballot.

What brought together and bonded these two unlikely partners was their common aspiration to represent the new wave in South Korean society. The coalition also made sense in that it joined Roh's liberal vision with the patriotism that Chung had come to represent. Indeed, the surprising coalition generated critical momentum for the new politics, pushing Roh's vote count over Lee's in the eventual two-way race in late November. (See Table 1.) From that point on, Roh never lost the lead.

The Voters

From 1987 to 2002, South Korean voters were a model of stability, loyalty, and ideological homogeneity. Their support for the three Kims was blind devotion that provided the trio with rock solid support. Regionalism was so prevalent that President Kim Dae-jung garnered about 90 percent of his support from his home region (the Cholla provinces) in three consecutive bids for the presidency since 1987. The 2002 election race marked a sea change. It involved not only a new generation of voters, but also the rise of more volatile and ideologically polarized voters. They had less interest in regionalism and more interest in policies. The coming-of-age of a new generation, the

information revolution brought by new technologies, the retirement of the “three Kims,” and the widening ideological gap since the 1990s converged to create a radically different attitude toward voting.

Young voters (age 20–39) came to account for more than half of the whole electorate for the first time in South Korean history. Baby boomers of the 1960s and 70s made up 52 percent of the electorate. This so-called 20/30 generation constituted the majority of “red devils” who frenziedly rooted for their team during its 2002 World Cup victory. Half-a-million red devils filled the squares in front of Seoul City Hall and Gwangwhamoon every time the home team took the field. When a U.S. military court delivered a not-guilty verdict to U.S. soldiers who were driving vehicles that killed two Korean schoolgirls, the 20/30 generation spearheaded nationwide anti-American protests that have continued since November 2002. Soccer fans and anti-American protesters both represent the national pride, self-determination, and self-expression of a new generation.

The 20/30 generation are the children of democratization, economic prosperity, relative peace, and an information society. In contrast, the older generation remembers the Korean War, poverty, and authoritarian government. Brought up in a democratic era, the new generation tends to be more self-expressive and assertive, a marked contrast to the older generation, survivors of three decades of authoritarian regimes that suppressed political expression and public demonstrations. South Korea’s phenomenal recovery from the 1997 financial crisis and continuing economic growth also bolster the confidence of the 20/30 generation, which prides itself in being different from its elders who had to survive years of destitution in the 1950s and the 1960s. The 20/30 generation does not have painful memories of a small, poor country in

which U.S. aid accounted for more than 30 percent of the government’s budget.

Relative peace with North Korea since the early 1990s accounts for the younger generation’s support for appeasement and dialogue with the Communist regime. The North-South Korea summit in 2000 and President Kim Dae-jung’s Sunshine policy moderated their perception of the North as a threat. What’s more, the rapid growth of the Internet has made the 20/30 generation better equipped for democracy than the old, by offering them access to more channels of information, means of expression, and ways of participation in politics. The 20/30 generation spends 10 to 20 hours a week surfing the Web. Roh’s liberal policies, credentials as a nationalist—though a moderate one—and accommodation of their new political demands earned him the overwhelming support of the 20/30 generation.

The second dimension of the new spirit among South Korean voters is a widening ideological gap since the early 1990s. Numbers of conservatives in the voting population surged dramatically, from 25.6 percent in 1992 to 40.3 percent in 1998, then decreased to 26.7 percent in 2002. Liberal voters increased from 32.7 percent of the voters in 1992 to 41.1 percent in 2002. Moderates shrank from 41.9 percent in 1992 to 32.3 percent in 2002. This ideological polarization results from various social and political changes. First, it reflects the emergence of a young generation with liberal attitudes. About 70 percent of young voters identify themselves as liberal, while older voters (ages 40–59) are clearly tilted toward conservatism. Second, democratization has helped to create ideological polarization. Since 1987 enhanced political freedoms have developed so dramatically that South Koreans have come to reveal their dispositions more openly than before.

Yet while ideological polarization has developed, it does not seem to yield a stable electoral alignment along ideological lines. The candidates’ levels of popularity vacillated wildly during the election year. Roh started in a position that many considered only a little better than hopeless. As a dark horse in the governing MDP, his popularity sat at only 24 percent in January 2002. The frontrunner Lee commanded 44.7 percent of popular support. Roh’s popularity surged to a dramatic 52 percent during the MDP primaries in April. His popularity later took a tumble, plummeting to 23 percent, partially on account of corruption scandals involving the incumbent President Kim Dae-jung’s sons, scandals that made headlines in June and July. Roh’s popularity fell even further in July, as World Cup fever helped Chung Mong-joon climb up to second place in popularity polls. However, in late November, Roh’s roller-coaster ride took him upward as a result of his surprising coalition with Chung. After forging the alliance, he bounced from third to first place in the race and never looked back.

Why so much volatility? As in many IT-advanced democracies, the increased amount of information available to voters was partially responsible. However, the declining influence of regionalism accounted even more for the volatility. With the retirement of the three Kims, South Korean voters lacked the usual base of electoral choice: home region. Charismatic regional leaders have bowed out, and the 2002 main contenders did not rely significantly upon regional conflict in their attempts to appeal to voters. The once stable electoral market, solid along lines of regional rivalry, has become more fluid.

The Issues

Various issues came and went during the election year, but the most critical issue came up in the later phase of the campaign. Since the deaths of the two schoolgirls struck by a U.S. forces vehicle on June 13, 2002, human rights organizations and college students have held sporadic protests. They contend that the South Korean judicial system should have played a larger role. They also contend that the South Korean court should be able to pass sentences in such cases, despite the fact that the accident occurred while the vehicle’s driver and track commander were on active duty. These groups demanded that the SOFA be amended in that direction. Responding to the rising protests, Secretary of State Colin Powell and the U.S. ambassador to Seoul made public apologies for the incident. The U.S. forces in Korea paid the family of each victim (approximately U.S. \$106,000). But much of the South Korean population viewed these efforts as piecemeal and insufficient.

The issue exploded into nationwide protests when the U.S. military court found the track commander of the vehicle not guilty on November 20, 2002. Deeply dissatisfied with the verdict, the 20/30 generation rapidly developed waves of protests, calling for the amendment of the SOFA and a public apology from President George W. Bush. Yet most participants did not join forces with radical groups that tried to turn the demonstrations into a call for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. In the meantime, a young teacher, Kim Ki-bo, proposed through an Internet bulletin that peaceful candlelight vigils be held at Gwangwhamoon Square. These vigils swiftly drew tens of thousands of protesters every weekend beginning in late November. Housewives and white-collar workers joined the protests along with representatives from human rights organizations

and student activists from across the country. Eventually, the candlelight vigils and protests induced the U.S. and South Korean governments to talk about amending the SOFA.

Even worse, the abrupt revelation in October that North Korea had an active nuclear program further complicated the issue. The North Korean nuclear program inevitably heightened tension between North Korea and the U.S. government. Given the Bush administration's fight against terrorism, which focuses on weapons of mass destruction and nuclear arms, Pyongyang's nuclear program put serious pressure on the ROK-U.S. alliance.

As a result, how to deal with North Korea and how to view the ROK-U.S. alliance emerged as dominant issues in the election: For many voters, the election became a choice between increased autonomy and close cooperation with the United States in dealing with North Korea. In principle, Roh represented more continuity with outgoing President Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine policy. In contrast, Lee offered unwavering support for the Bush administration's policy in dealing with North Korea. Although the two candidates tried to moderate their positions on the issue in an attempt to attract undecided voters in December, the distinction between them looked simple and clear. The voters' choice revealed that the country was almost evenly divided along this line. Roh won the election but only by a narrow margin of 2.3 percent.

Another crucial point in the election has to do with its puzzling result. How did the candidate of the governing MDP win the election amid extreme public antagonism toward the governing party and incumbent president? Like his predecessors, President Kim Dae-jung experienced a dramatic fall in popularity toward the end of his five-year term. His approval rating plummeted to be-

low 20 percent in the last year of his tenure. The usual "lame-duck" branding of outgoing presidents was not the only factor responsible for his fall. Two of his sons had been charged with accepting huge bribes from businesses. They exerted improper influence on governmental contracts. These corruption scandals cost the governing MDP the local elections in June and by-elections in August.

How did the governing party candidate score such a dramatic victory in December? Why did the voters not punish the governing party again in the presidential election? Because the governing party had drastically renovated itself. Roh and the reform faction within the MDP introduced fundamental reforms within the party, and they were successful in presenting a different party to voters during the presidential campaign. They introduced primaries for presidential-candidate nominations and separated presidential power from the party. By adopting U.S.-style primaries for nominations for the first time in South Korean political history, the governing party transformed itself from a pre-modern, elite party to a modern, open party. It also attracted voters who had long been eager to participate in the decision-making processes of political parties. Presidential primaries in sixteen provinces and cities across the country attracted widespread participation among voters and party members. Approximately 1.8 million voters participated in the party primaries that selected 35,000 delegates. The primaries further enhanced the MDP's reform image by selecting a dark horse with a reform bent and populist image, Roh Moo-hyun, rather than the famous frontrunner, Rhee In-je.

In contrast, the opposition Grand National Party lagged far behind in the race for party reform. Only after the primaries of the MDP had thrilled the country did the GNP introduce its own primaries. Lee Hoi-chang,

the predictable winner, was hastily selected leaving little belief that deep reform had taken place within the GNP.

As a result, many voters came to perceive the MDP as a renovated party with a young, popular leader capable of dismantling the old, closed, oligarchic political parties of the three Kims era. In striking contrast, the GNP, with its lukewarm attitude toward political reform, was viewed as more of the same.

The Campaigns

While the main targets of the two main candidates during the campaign were undecided voters, their approaches to reaching them were strikingly different. Roh used and even invented new ways of campaigning that worked in concert with the changes within society, whereas Lee relied upon traditional campaign tactics.

Roh's campaign focused on communication, volunteers, and information technologies. The linchpin was NOSAMO—or "the association of voters who like Roh Moo-hyun." It represented the nation's first large, voluntary support organization for an individual politician. The association, 70,000-members strong, became actively involved in party primaries, electoral campaigning, and fundraising. It organized rallies during the primaries and campaign, led online debates, and initiated the movement for small donations to be made to their candidate. Thanks to the association's efforts, hundreds of thousands of Internet users visited Roh's official campaign site every day, exchanging and sharing views on election issues during the campaign. They also helped Roh accumulate 7 billion Korean Won (approximately U.S. \$6 million) from 200,000 small-amount contributors. This grassroots-style fundraising—common within advanced democracies—came into full fruition for the first time in the South Korean democracy.

Lee's campaign could not compare to Roh's. Crowds that were made up of mostly middle-aged voters filled the halls of his campaign rallies. Money or other material incentives mobilized most of them. Lee did not completely ignore the power of communication technology. He attempted to emulate Roh's tactic by pouring a substantial amount of money into political advertising on the Internet and TV. Yet such efforts proved futile due to his aristocratic image and lack of understanding about the Internet generation. Furthermore, the public was well aware that Lee's two sons had not served their military duty and that Lee led a life of luxury. To Lee's dismay, political advertising could not change the voters' perceptions. While rock stars and popular actors played key roles in Roh's TV advertising, middle-aged politicians dominated Lee's advertising. Also, in sharp contrast with Roh, Lee's campaign funds came mostly from large donations from big businesses and close friends.

The New Administration

The new administration faces many crucial tasks, especially managing economic reform, dealing with the demand for a new politics, and repairing the South Korea-U.S. relationship. While the new government will start its five-year term with a refreshing vision and ambitious goals, the balance between vision and reality, between change and the status quo, will determine its ultimate course.

When it comes to economic reform, a statement by the president-elect vividly illustrates the dilemma of future efforts. At his first press conference after the election, Roh said that "large corporations are essential for economic growth, but we need to reform the inefficient chaebol system." In his campaign promises, the liberal candidate pledged both reform of the chaebol-dominated economic system and 7 percent economic growth. The

two goals reveal the basic paradox that the new administration will have to wrestle with in economic policymaking. If vibrant economic growth is desired, this new government needs to sustain a cooperative relationship with the big businesses whose corporate management and accounting practices it wants to reform.

In its initial tug-of-war with the chaebols in January, the new government's transition committee unveiled what it had in mind to change the inefficient chaebol system. First, it revealed a plan to introduce a law allowing investors to bring class action suits against brokerage firms or investment management companies in stock-price manipulation cases and false public disclosures. The measure is intended to protect minority shareholders' rights against the power of family-run chaebols. The committee also disclosed plans to adopt an all-inclusive taxation system that will impose taxes on all types of inheritance and gifts. It believes that the current law has failed to prevent the illegal transfer of wealth from chaebol owners to their children, because it imposes taxes on only fourteen specified types of inheritance and gifts. Still another measure to reform corporate management was the placement of a ceiling on equity investment by chaebols. To prevent overextension of chaebols, the committee suggested that chaebols be allowed to have asset investments in their own affiliates and other companies up to only 25 percent of their net worth.

Will the new administration make sweeping reforms? Or will it implement piecemeal reforms decorated with endless rhetoric as was the case with the Kim Dae-jung administration? The reformers' internal cohesion and their political competence will determine the outcome. The more politically coherent the reformers within the new administration, the more sweeping the reform of the chaebol sys-

tem. The transition committee for the new administration excluded bureaucrats and was largely filled with relatively young, reform-oriented college professors. This makeup indicates that reform groups have won the first round. Yet the power struggle between reform groups and career bureaucrats is far from over. In late January Roh nominated Koh Kun, an iconic successful career bureaucrat, for prime minister of his government. Thus far, the president-elect seems to be seeking a balance between reform groups and bureaucrats in his appointment of cabinet members, Blue House advisors, and other significant jobs in the administration. On the one hand, the president-elect has looked for advice on international relations and economic management from conservative experts including former ambassadors, foreign ministers, and ministers of economic planning. On the other hand, he repeatedly emphasizes his promises to reform social and economic policies.

The reformers' political competence will also be a crucial determinant of the outcome of their efforts. In this area, prospects are not very bright. First of all, although chaebol reform has been a popular item on the political agenda, the new government's mandate is not enormous given the tight race between the two main contenders. Second, the new government has to pursue its reform measures in a divided government, because the conservative opposition party controls a majority in the National Assembly. As most reform measures require new legislation, it will be a daunting task for the government to pass sweeping reforms. Because party-line voting is remarkably high in the South Korean National Assembly, the prospects for economic reform legislation are not very good. To obtain support from the conservative opposition party, President Roh will be forced to pursue the politics of persuasion, as U.S.

presidents in a divided government do. Roh Moo-hyun has already made initial moves by paying unprecedented visits to the speaker of the National Assembly and the opposition party headquarters. He has also emphasized the necessity of a bipartisan approach to reform measures. Yet it still remains to be seen to what extent the incoming president will effectively mobilize his political resources and network to draw support from members of the conservative opposition party.

Kim Dae-jung's reform drive began right after the devastating financial crisis of 1997, giving the administration a wide window of opportunity to enact drastic reform. In contrast, the incoming Roh administration is inheriting a solid economy from its predecessor, although the economic outlook for 2003 is not rosy. Good times do not give much opportunity for sweeping reforms, as evidenced in many cases of attempted policy reform across democratic polities. So it is crucial for the incoming administration to mobilize the cry for reform voiced in last year's election.

Another crucial task for the new administration is to deal with the tide of new politics that swelled during the 2002 election campaign. As the demand for new politics contributed substantially to Roh's victory, it will surely influence how the new administration does its job and what it focuses on. For instance, there is an early sign that the new government is trying hard to accommodate the people's demand for direct democracy. The transition committee has set up a People's Policy Recommendation Center through which citizens can make policy proposals and even offer recommendations for cabinet members to the incoming government. In fact, about 2,000 policy recommendations and hundreds of personnel recommendations were filed in a month. Furthermore, as president-elect, Roh appointed a reform-minded lawyer as Presidential Advisor on

People's Participation, a position that was established in January. Along with the Presidential Advisor on Communication, the new advisor is in charge of maintaining two-way communication between the presidential office and the public through Internet voting, Internet opinion polls, and the like.

The new president has continued his pledge to "go to the public" by holding town meetings in five cities across the country in January. New politics has shaped the new administration's policy concerns. Responding to demands presented in the election campaign, the transition committee focuses its policy reviews not only on economic reform and foreign policy but also on the devolution of power to local governments and on fighting discrimination based upon gender or nationality.

Although the drive toward the new politics will help the new administration by considerably enhancing people's participation and support, it has its drawbacks. The new administration seems to rely more on public opinion, which is likely to be volatile and sometimes unpredictable, than on institutional procedures and rules. While the new administration will be far from the populist regimes found in Latin America, it seems to be riding on the will of the public.

Implications for South Korea-U.S. Relations

Rejuvenating South Korea's relationship with the United States is probably a more daunting task than economic reform for the new administration. Both South Korea and the United States, partners in a solid alliance for five decades, have recently witnessed many signs of souring relations. As President-elect Roh emphasized in a meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly on January 14, many South Koreans understand that a sound relationship with the United

States is crucial to the health of South Korea's economy, security, and politics. Given their shared economic and democratic values, there is no doubt that the alliance between the two countries will survive the current strain.

Yet the new administration must re-adjust the alliance alongside the Bush administration. The current tension has two dimensions. First, there is a rapidly increasing schism between the two partners with regard to North Korea. As the United States experienced a Copernican transformation in its perception of external threats after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is not surprising that the North Korean nuclear and missile programs have sounded alarm bells loud enough to have President Bush declare North Korea an axis of evil member in his 2002 State of the Union Address. But South Koreans have remarkably moderated their perception of North Korea as a threat in recent years. Many South Koreans, especially those of the 20/30 generation, have come to believe that the North Korean nuclear program is not directed at them.

Second, domestic changes have also increased tension in the alliance. The older generation in South Korea, accustomed to a patron-client relationship with the United States, has lost its voice, while the younger generation demands a larger role for South Korea in this partnership. The 20/30 generation is not anti-American, given the value it places on individualism, freedom, and a global culture, but it shows great zeal for self-determination and national pride. There has been a great transformation across the Pacific, too. The United States seems to have become a totally different country since 9/11. It increasingly judges other nations as good or evil based upon their belief in democracy and a market economy. And American tolerance toward nations it perceives as evil has decreased.

The partners are experiencing domestic and international transformations much faster and much grander than they themselves may recognize. Social values, foreign policy, and domestic politics in the United States are now changing so greatly that its alliance partner has difficulty grasping the new reality. And South Korea, a key American ally in Asia, is going through such tremendous political and social change that even an old friend is having a hard time following it.

Given President-elect Roh Moo-hyun's drive for moderation, the new South Korean administration will seek to alleviate tension within the alliance. On the positive side, moderation will be the watchword in regards to his foreign policy plans, especially considering the divided ROK government. Also, since the nation is evenly divided on how to deal with North Korea and how to readjust its relationship with the United States, the new president will most likely maintain a practical approach. Indeed, he has paid a visit to the U.S. military camp in Yongsan, Seoul and agreed with the U.S. government that he will visit Washington, D.C. in March for his first overseas trip. Both MDP president Hahn Hwa-kap and special envoy Chung Dae-chul have visited Washington to lay the groundwork for President Roh's visit. The more the president recognizes the difference between campaigning and governing, the more practical his approach will be.

The only event that would force difficult choices upon this new administration would be another surprise from North Korea and consequent hard-line response from the Bush administration. George Kennan, architect of the American foreign policy of containment in the 1940s, once remarked that an "enemy is better than a friend" when he was painstakingly dealing with a recalcitrant France during the postwar construction of Western Europe. Under the current state of affairs,

American and South Korean leaders might be reminded that staying friends requires more effort than bashing enemies.

Conclusion

President Roh Moo-hyun represents not simply the emergence of another liberal government but also the beginning of a new era in South Korea. A new tide of ideological competition, the 20/30 generation, and voluntary participation has replaced the old order of regionalism, personal charisma, and closed party politics. Yet the transition brings about more tasks than achievements for the South Korean people and their new administration. While many South Koreans have cheered the arrival of the new era, they are also faced with new realities and new problems. For instance, there is a growing tension between enhanced nationalism and Korea's place in a globalized world. South Korea is now confronted with the daunting task of harmonizing growing nationalistic sentiment with its deeply embedded position in a world of highly interdependent trade, security, and finance. Also, there is a strain between political institutions and explosive enthusiasm for political participation. The generation change and the advent of an information society have remarkably enhanced people's desire to participate in politics; however, South Korea's political institutions, like its political parties, have a limited capacity for accommodating the rapidly increasing demand for participation. The management of such growing pains will largely determine the future of the Roh administration as well as South Korea's journey toward becoming a mature democracy.

The rise of new politics in South Korea also poses considerable challenges for its allies and neighbors. The government no longer monopolizes South Korean foreign policy. With the progress of democratiza-

tion, the government is under more pressure from the public and civic groups in its decisionmaking. As it did in the recent election, the voice of public and civic groups will play a greater role than it has in the past in dealing with North Korea and in revitalizing the ROK-U.S. alliance. South Korea and its allies need to diversify their channels of communication and multiply their levels of cooperation and exchange.

Table 1. Popularity of Candidates in Election Year

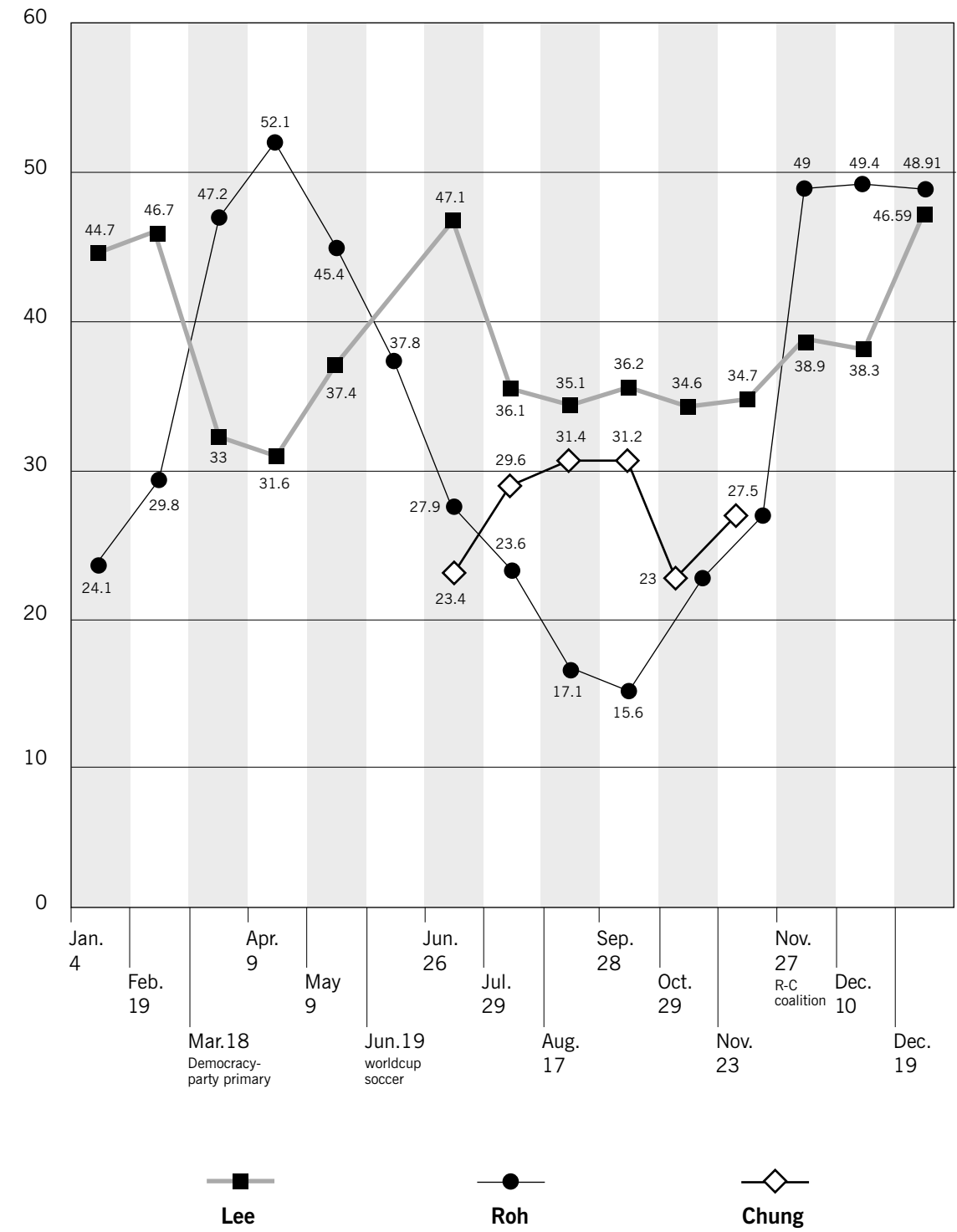


Table 2. Electoral Choice by Age in Presidential Elections (percent)

Age Group	Lee in 1997	Kim Dae-jung in 1997	Roh in 2002	Lee in 2002
20–29	28	43	62	31
30–39	35	44	59	34
40–49	44	37	47	49
50+	51	34	40	58

Source: KBS exit poll and Gallup Korea poll.

Table 3. Ideological Polarization among Voters

	Strong Conservative	Weak Conservative	Center	Weak Liberal	Strong Liberal
1992	2.9	22.7	41.9	29.0	3.7
1994	4.4	25.3	47.1	21.1	2.1
1996	5.5	26.1	41.3	24.5	2.7
1997	7.4	34.1	22.2	27.9	8.4
1998	5.1	35.2	23.6	27.6	8.4
2000	9.2	20.5	37.5	22.2	10.6
2002	3.2	23.5	32.3	34.0	7.1

Source: Lee Jong-bok (1992), Sejong National Public Opinion Survey (1995, 1996), Korean National Election Study (1997, 1998, 2000, 2002).

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