

A study on ways to continue and advance the political career of female members of local councils

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The purpose of this study is to examine women's representation in politics and reveal strategies to continue and advance the career of female members of local councils. According to the results of the fifth local elections, held on June 2 2010, the number of female council members stood at 21.6% of basic local council members, 14.8% of city or provincial council members and 2.6% of the heads of provincial bodies. These numbers are found to have increased slightly from 15.0%, 12.0%, and 1.3%, respectively, in the 4th local elections in 2006. On the other hand, 581 female members or 80.2% of the total elected female council members were elected for the first time, while 146 female members (18.3%) were reelected.

It is assumed that an adjustment period is required for female members elected for the first time to grow accustomed to their schedule and activities in the council. The more times a female member is reelected to the council, the more often they are found to be nominated as a chair and as a committee chair. As a result, it is critical to continue and advance the careers of female members of local councils given that their experience and know-how will be a considerable asset in implementing local policies, an emerging issue in the era of localization.

To overcome the obstacles detailed above, this study has put forward three overall directions. First, it suggests three measures: introduction of a 30 percent mandatory female quota of proportional representation and assistance in female members' efforts to advance into higher-level councils; and allowance of minor fund-raising activities by local council members. Second, the following are recommended for the promotion of a more gender-sensitive nomination system: designation of 50 percent of the seats in the standing committees of local councils designation of constituencies, especially from among those favorable to the party in question, exclusively assigned to female candidates provision of guidelines for the candidate nomination procedure; and re-nomination of qualified female local council members. Third, efforts to cultivate and

support the success of female politicians are called for. To achieve this, several measures need to be taken: introduction of a female quota in the nomination of leadership and standing committee members introduction of an obligatory female quota system for major positions within the party implementation of a system to identify and cultivate female politicians establishment of a training system for female candidates at the party level and establishment of programs to promote the development and entrenchment of female candidates in constituencies.

Keywords: women's political representation, local council, female council members, career continuance, career advancement, nomination of female candidates, female quota, cultivation of female politicians

1. Research objectives

This research is designed to seek out measures to promote the continuation and advancement of the political careers of female members of local councils. Although the number of female council members has increased since the initial nationwide local elections, about 581 (80.2 percent) of the 739 female council members elected in the fifth local elections of 2010 were first-time members. New council members usually require two to three years of experience prior to developing proficiency in council activities. For that reason, the interruption of a career can result in the weakening of activities in a number of respects, including council activities, continuation of the policies under pursuit, networking both within and outside their political party, and the development of female leadership in political circles. Focusing on these problems, this study attempts to identify measures to help female council members continue and possibly advance their career from basic local councils to city or provincial councils and then on to becoming heads of autonomous provincial bodies.

2. Research details

This research is focused on three areas. First, it will offer theoretical reflections on the career continuation of female politicians in order to offer grounds for the need for a system of support. Second, it will review the candidate nomination process of major political parties to identify its relation with women's political representation. Third, it will probe the perceived obstacles to the career continuity of female politicians and measures to promote the continuance and possible advancement of their careers, based on a survey of female council members elected in the 2010 local elections and in-depth interviews with ten former and incumbent female politicians. In conclusion, this research is intended to suggest ways to support the continuation and advancement of the careers of female council members.

3. Research methods

Regarding career continuance, an online survey was carried out over 17 days from September 1 to September 16, 2010 among a total of 739 female members of both basic local and provincial councils elected in the fifth nation-wide local elections in 2010. The response rate was 45.5 percent (336 persons). The questionnaire spanned female politicians' perceptions of and attitudes toward career continuance and advancement perceived obstacles to continuing their political careers perceptions of and attitudes toward the party nomination process, which is a critical window for the continuance of a political career determining factors in winning an election and perceptions of the measures for career continuance and expansion.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with female politicians in order to complement the survey with data of greater specificity. The interviewees included six council members reelected in the fifth local elections, three individuals who failed to achieve a final nomination, and one who dropped out of a race. Based on the results from these interviews, the career paths and directions of female politicians were traced. The resources utilized and their effectiveness for the career continuance of female politicians were compared.

4. Research results

- According to the results of this research, women who were elected to office more than twice demonstrated a higher level of expertise and efficiency in council activities compared to first-time members. With their position and influence within the party more fully developed with each re-election, they were able to assume greater political leadership within their party as well. It may also be more likely that their influence and leadership contribute to the more stable development of the community.
- From reflection upon the theoretical background, four primary reasons were identified for the need for career continuance and advancement of female politicians.
 - a) Expertise needs to be established in council activities such as policy development.
 - b) Political competitiveness of female members needs to be enhanced through the incumbency effect.
 - c) Women's political empowerment needs to be developed by increasing the proportion of female members in the leadership of local councils.
 - d) Women's political representation should first be expanded as a foundation for the career continuance of female politicians; this supports a need for proactive implementation of the female quota.

- The bylaws of major political parties and statistical data from local elections were analyzed in order to discover the relationship between the nomination systems of major parties, their efforts to increase the number of female candidates, and women's representation in the fifth local elections.

- ① With the introduction of a mandatory female quota in the nomination of election candidates prior to the fifth local elections, major parties included this requirement in their party regulations and made efforts to increase women's representation by mandating a more women-friendly nomination process, including assigning a certain number of female members to the nomination deliberation committee.
- ② Thanks to these efforts, the total number of female candidates in the fifth elections increased by 232 individuals(5.6%) over the previous elections. As a cascade effect, the number of elected female members increased by 216 persons and the proportion of women among elected politicians reached 19.1 percent, a 5.5 percent increase over the previous elections.
- ③ However, the issue of career continuance of female politicians remains unresolved; 82.3 percent of the female elected members in Gwangyeok councils and 78.1 percent of those in Gicho councils elevated to office in the fifth local elections were first-time members. This means that although women's advancement into local councils has made remarkable progress due to efforts such as the mandatory female quota in the nomination process and the regulation mandating female candidates be assigned to every odd number in the list of proportional representation candidates, such efforts were insufficient to ensure female politicians continue in their political careers and make full use of their experience.

- The following are the results of the survey regarding career continuance of female council members elected in the 2010 local elections.

- ① In both Gicho and Gwangyeok councils, the career continuance rate was higher among candidates for district elections than it was among proportional representatives. In addition, the desire for reelection among female local council members was high, with nearly eight out of ten members (78.6 %) expressing an intention to stand in the next elections. Furthermore, 80.2percent of first-time members hoped to advance to Gicho or Gwangyeok constituencies in the next election cycle, showing their intention to continue their political careers by strengthening their foothold in their constituencies.
- ② As to obstacles facing continuing a career as female politicians, the respondents pointed to a low rate of nomination of female candidates in district elections (27.1%), prejudice against female politicians (26.2%), relatively weak funding and organizational standing compared to male politicians (25.0%), and difficulties in managing a constituency (13.7%). Asked about possible political and social issues caused by female politicians' career discontinuance, more than half the respondents replied positively to every item, including reduced

female political participation, disruption of the council activities by female politicians, impediment of the continuation of women-friendly policies, weakened connection with party organizations and networks, and diminished female leadership in political circles.

- ③ Asked about core variables in ensuring career continuance, proportional representatives pointed to expertise in a specific area as being among the most important factors in achieving nomination, while candidates for district elections picked the female quota in nomination and scale of contribution to the party. When it comes to the relationship between party leadership and nomination, more respondents believed that the chair of the district committee (69.1%) wields greatest influence over nomination than named the head of the central party (9.8%). This result seems to reflect the characteristics of the current party system in which local elections are managed on a practical level by district committees and deliberation committees from the party's provincial offices.
- ④ Regarding measures for career continuance and advancement, 37.8 percent thought that women should assume over 50 percent of the seats on the nomination deliberation committee to ensure it being more women-friendly; 74.7 percent believed that strategic nominations based on a female quota should be expanded. The respondents also indicated that the weight given to opinion polls and public voting need to be increased in the primary system.

- The results of the in-depth interviews with ten former and incumbent female politicians are as follows:

- ① As to the factors that determined their initial election, the interviewees listed the chair of the district committee and public organizations, party approval ratings, their history of activities in the community, private groups and their personal network, and the level of public recognition and positive image of the candidate (expertise, ability). In response to determining factors for their re-election, the majority of the interviewees pointed to nomination, purporting that the greatest difficulty they faced was surviving the nomination process. In particular, they must combat a negative perception of female members who desire to run again, exemplified as "You've done it once. Why don't you stay away from competition this time?"
- ② In relation to the effects of continuing in a political career, they indicated increased efficiency in council activities and heightened levels of work satisfaction. Regarding party activities, the interviewees marked as advantages of continued careers greater influence based on a more established position within the party and an increased ability to contribute to the development of their community through the stable implementation of policies. Meanwhile, one of the greatest challenges faced by a majority of female politicians was maintaining a balance between council activities and family life.
- ③ Asked about obstacles to continuing in their political careers, the female politicians listed the influence and factional politics of the chair of the district committee, improper use of

the female quota, unfairness and absurdity in the primary system, and nomination criteria that exist only for the sake of formality. In relation to systemic elements, they replied that the bias against gender roles limits the leadership of female politicians.

- ④ Among the support for the career continuance of female politicians that the interviewees perceived to be called for was the establishment of programs to promote the development and entrenchment of female candidates in constituencies and a system to identify and cultivate capable female candidates. They also highlighted the importance of efforts to reform the nomination system by calling for: reasonable measures to limit the power of the district committee chair over the nomination process, rules to establish a transparent and reasonable nomination procedure, a more women-friendly system for the nomination deliberation, and the revision of the female quota to include improvement measures, such as the designation of constituencies exclusively assigned to female candidates. In regard to the election system, the interviewees underlined the need to improve the subsidy system for the nomination of female candidates and to assist in a more active engagement by female politicians in council activities by allowing small-scale donations to council members, shifting them to paid activities, providing an independent secretariat, and increasing the number of support staff and organizations.

5. Policy suggestions

- The imbalance between first-time and re-elected members seems to be a structural consequence of the unreasonableness in the election system and the nomination process combined with sociocultural perceptions of female politicians. Points of improvement are suggested in three areas: governance-related laws including the Public Official Election Act and the Political Funds Act; the party nomination system, which is a crucial factor in ensuring the career continuance of female politicians; and the cultivation of career female politicians.

Measures to improve governance-related laws

First, a mandatory female quota of the assignment of 30 percent of district election candidacies for local councils to female candidates is recommended.

- According to this research, election-based members have higher level of career continuance compared to proportional representatives, based on their level of recognition among their constituency. It is recommended that the current female quota be changed to a 30 percent mandatory quota for district seats in order to promote female candidates building a support base in their constituency.
- An incentive of a 30 percent increase in their subsidy can be offered to those parties that comply with the 30 percent female quota for district seats.

Second, the percentage of proportional representatives can be increased.

- In preparation for a number of coming public official elections, it is necessary to increase the rate of proportional representation and the number of election-based members in local councils, accompanied by an overall review of the appropriateness of the total number of members of local councils.
 - Numerous political scientists have pointed to the fact that compared to other OECD countries, the total number of members of local South Korean councils is relatively low for the population, number of public officials, and the pace of economic development.
 - The number of seats for proportional representation is 375 among the total 2,888 seats (14.9%) on Gicho councils and 78 among the 733 total seats (11.9%) on Gwangyeok councils. It has been argued that these numbers are insufficient to meet the intended goal of representation of a variety of professions and accumulation of expertise.
- Therefore, measures need to be put in place to increase the number of female proportional representatives while maintaining the 50 percent female quota and increasing the number of seats for proportional representation.
- For example, the ratio of election-based members to proportional representatives can be adjusted to 2:1, while the percentage of female nominees for proportional representation can be increased to over 70 percent.
- These measures will lower the threshold for women entering local councils and help increase the likelihood of their career continuance.

Third, the system of subsidy for the nomination of female candidates needs to be improved.

- The subsidy for the nomination of female candidates, a measure intended to increase women's political participation, aims to encourage parties to nominate female candidates and thereby support women's advancement into political circles.
- However, the current practical operation fails to uphold the spirit of the system. For example, the Democratic Labor Party, which was considered a model for its nomination of the largest proportion of female election-based candidates and complying with the obligatory 30 percent female quota, received the lowest sum of money for the 2010 local elections. This is because the distribution of subsidies for nominating female candidates has adopted the system of distributing government subsidies to political parties.
- The subsidy should be offered in proportion to the number of seats or percentage of votes earned in the elections. If such a revision were made, the amount of subsidy should then be raised in order to support female candidates, who suffer relative lack of funds, organization, and assistance from within their party, in order to encourage parties to nominate a larger proportion of female candidates.

Fourth, small-scale donations to local council members should be allowed.

- Currently, the annual salary of local council members is around 20 to 30 million won, without any provision for assistants. This is insufficient for livelihood support, let alone for hiring staff, renting an office, and developing policies.
- In this regard, it seems necessary to review the need for allowing small-scale donations to members of local councils.

Measures to improve the party nomination system

First, the nomination deliberation committee should be bound by law to fill half the seats with women.

- The nomination process should grow more women-friendly and better represent women by filling a minimum of 50 percent of the committee seats with female members.
 - The nomination deliberation committees of South Korea's political parties have primarily consisted of men.
 - Although women began participating in these committees from the 16th general election in 2000 and their number has been on the rise, it still stands at around 30 percent. For the nomination deliberation committees of central parties in the 2010 local elections, the figure was 28.6 percent for the Grand National Party and 33.3 percent for the Democratic Party.

Second, standard criteria for the women-friendly deliberation of nominations should be prepared and incentives be provided to female candidates.

- Measures are required to set limits on the power of the chair of the district committee over the nomination process.
 - When asked about the influence of the party leadership on nomination in the 2010 local elections, the survey respondents replied that the chair of the district committee (69.1%) wields more direct influence than does the leader of the central party (9.8%).
- To resolve this issue, criteria for deliberation of nominations and a procedural standard should be emplaced in order to create a more transparent and reasonable deliberation process through which anyone involved in the nomination process can accept the results.
- Furthermore, measures need to be implemented to ensure a more women-friendly process and deliberation criteria, such as providing incentive points to female candidates as part of efforts to support political minorities.
 - For example, the results of polls of local constituents may be weighted more heavily than the results of the primaries for delegates or standing committee members, both of which require financial and organizational power. This will ensure a degree of leveling of the playing field for female candidates, who typically lack in funding and organizational support compared to their male counterparts.

Third, the performance of council activities should be reflected in deliberation of nomination in order to ensure the re-nomination of qualified members.

- It is necessary to safeguard the re-nomination of those female candidates with positive performance results by reflecting that performance in the deliberation process. It is also required to strategically nominate a given percentage of female candidates to constituencies favorable to the party in question. The experience and know-how of female council members will be a considerable asset in implementing neighborhood policies, which is an emerging issue in the era of localization.

Measures to cultivate career female politicians

First, a female quota can be introduced in the nomination of leadership and standing committee members.

- While the members of the standing committees of local councils are elected based on expertise, constituency, and experience, the committees lack a significant number of female members due to the relatively small pool of female council members.
- Although this issue may become resolved if the number of female council members increases, a female quota needs to be introduced for nominating leadership and standing committee members in order to assist female politicians in developing expertise and leadership and contributing to the cultivation of a greater number of female candidates.

Second, a female quota can be introduced for major positions within the party.

- Serving in positions of responsibility within a party can be of great assistance in developing women's political leadership and expertise.
 - It can also become a channel to allow female politicians to contribute to the party to a greater degree and raise their level of recognition within and without the party, possibly affecting their nomination and advancement to local councils.
- Therefore, it is advisable to introduce an obligatory female quota system for major positions within the party.

Third, parties should establish a system to identify and cultivate qualified female politicians.

- Parties should emplace a permanent system for the systematic cultivation and management of talent in order to develop qualified female politicians.
- Given that one of the roles of political parties is to foster political elites, a permanent training and education program for female politicians should be implemented. Incentives such as nomination to the leadership of the central party or as election candidates can be offered to those who have completed the program with an exceptional performance.
- Training teams for female candidates can be organized in regional offices, in addition to within the central party, in order to increase the pool of female candidates.

Fourth, a program is needed to help female candidates develop and settle in district constituencies.

- While one of the greatest challenges facing female council members is managing their constituency, election-based members enjoy a higher level of career continuance compared to proportional representatives. In this regard, it appears necessary to introduce a program to assist women in establishing a stronghold within their constituency in order to elevate women's political participation and support their career continuance.

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