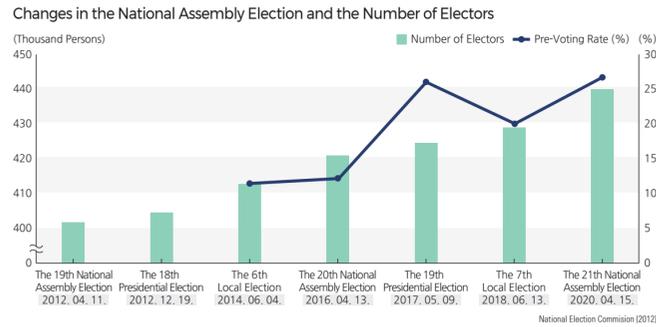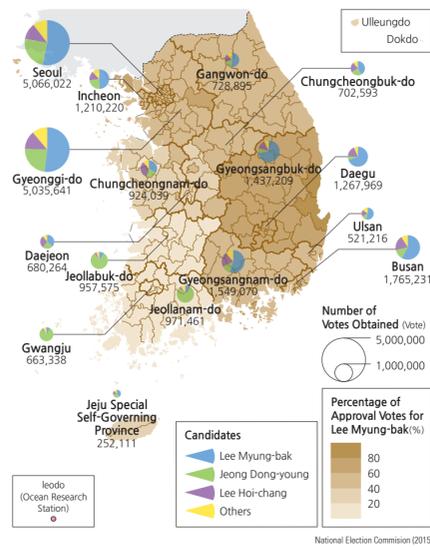# Politics and Election

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 enacting the law on the franchise to overseas residents, implementing an early-voting system, and lowering the election age have been introduced to guarantee voting rights and increase voting participation.
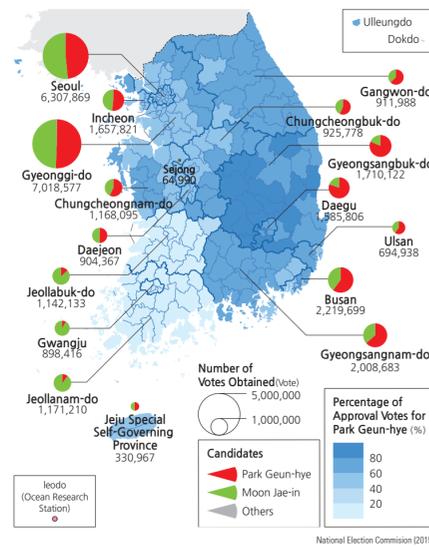
The ROK has adopted a five-year single-term system for the presidency and the unicameral National Assembly. National Assembly members are elected in single-member district first-past-the-post voting. These members are also elected in proportional representation, with seats allocated by political parties. In addition, as the local autonomy system was revived in 1991, members of local councils have been elected in local elections. Since 1995, the Simultaneous Nationwide Local Elections have been held every four years. The culture of grassroots democracy is building a solid foundation of democracy for Korea by these elections, in which local citizens in each administrative district organize a local
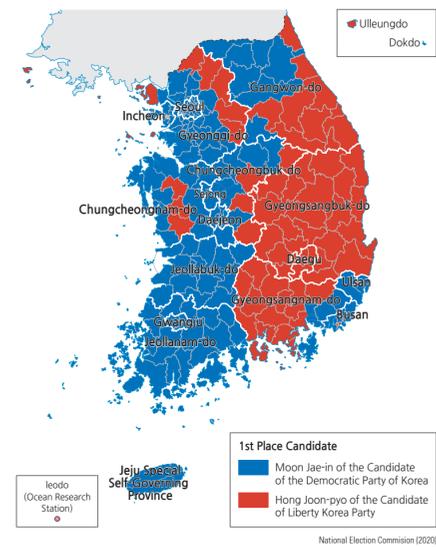
Changes in the National Assembly Election and the Number of Electors

(Thousand Persons)
Number of Electors ■   Pre-Voting Rate (%) ●—
The 19th National Assembly Election 2012. 04. 11.
The 18th Presidential Election 2012. 12. 19.
The 6th Local Election 2014. 06. 04.
The 20th National Assembly Election 2016. 04. 13.
The 19th Presidential Election 2017. 05. 09.
The 7th Local Election 2018. 06. 13.
The 21th National Assembly Election 2020. 04. 15.
National Election Commission (2012)

Results of the 17th Presidential Election (2007)

Candidates
Lee Myung-bak
Jeong Dong-young
Lee Hoi-chang
Others

Percentage of Approval Votes for Lee Myung-bak (%)
80 60 40 20

Number of Votes Obtained (vote)
5,000,000
1,000,000

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

National Election Commission (2015)

Results of the 18th Presidential Election (2012)

Candidates
Park Geun-hye
Moon Jae-in
Others

Percentage of Approval Votes for Park Geun-hye (%)
80 60 40 20

Number of Votes Obtained (vote)
5,000,000
1,000,000

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

National Election Commission (2015)

Results of the 19th Presidential Election (2017)

1st Place Candidate
Moon Jae-in of the Candidate of the Democratic Party of Korea
Hong Joon-pyo of the Candidate of Liberty Korea Party

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

National Election Commission (2020)

Results of the 19th Presidential Election: Jung-gu, Seoul (2017)

Candidates
Moon Jae-in
Hong Jun-pyo
Ahn Cheol-soo
Yoo Seung-min
Sim Sang-jung
Others

Number of Votes Obtained (vote)
10,000
5,000
1,000

Percentage of Approval Votes for Moon Jae-in (%)
41 39 37 35

National Election Commission (2017)
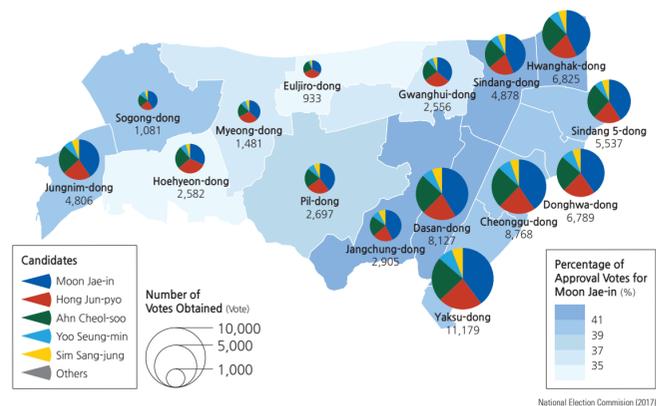
council, choose an administrative representative such as the mayor, provincial governor, and county governor, and select policy agendas.
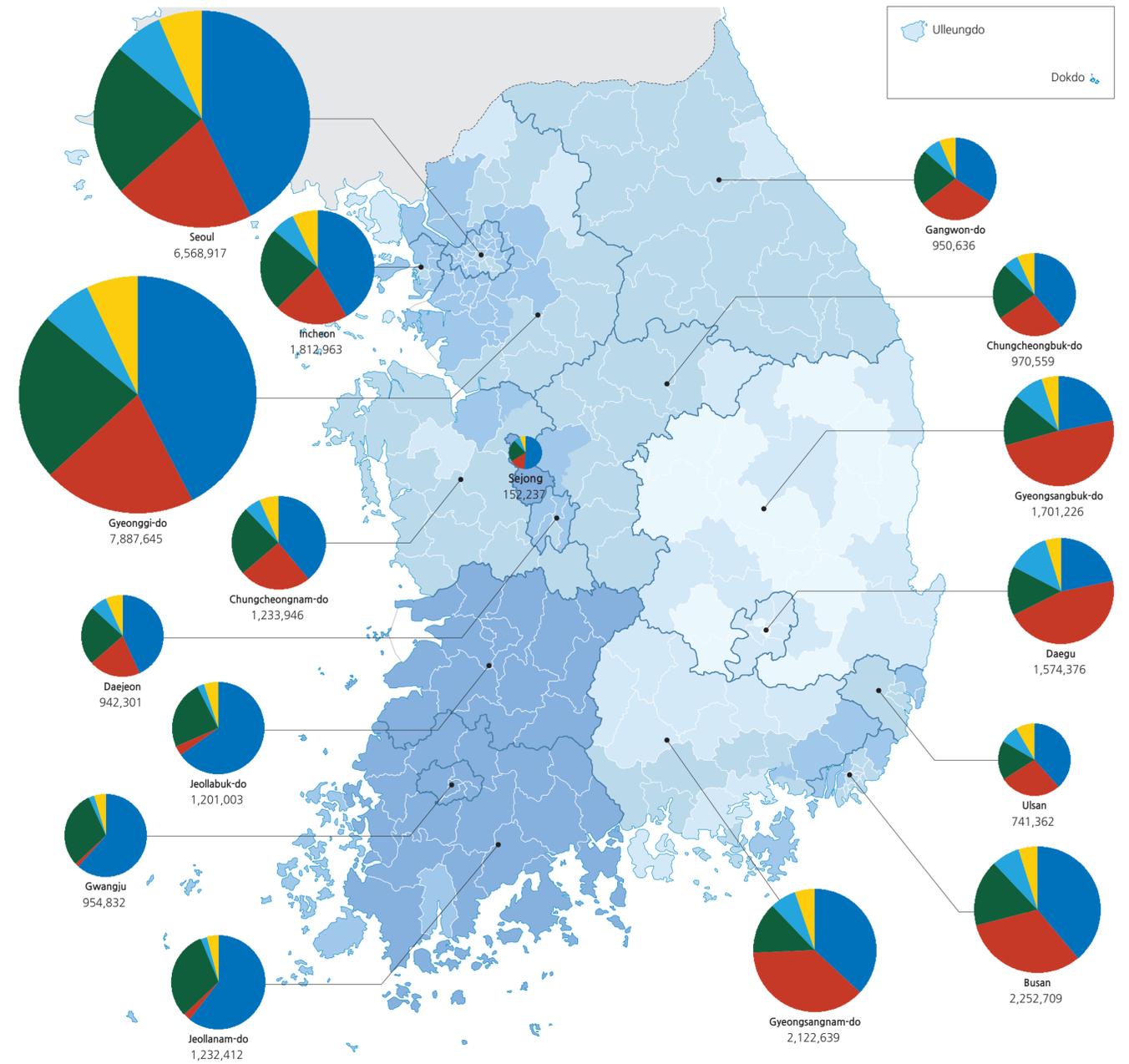
In 1987, the ROK adopted a five-year single-term system for the presidency through a constitutional amendment that gave citizens the direct vote to elect the president. The 19th presidential election in May 2017 attracted 13 candidates, such as Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party of Korea, Hong Jun-pyo 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.

The turnout rate was 77.2%. Voters chose Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party of Korea, who received 13,423,800 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-do. 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 emerged 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 independents Park Jong-son, Kim So-yeon, Kang Ji-won, and Kim Sun-ja ran for office. Park Geun-hye of the Saenuri Party won the presidency with 55.15% of the vote. Opponent Moon Jae-in of the Democratic United Party received 48.02% of votes. Park
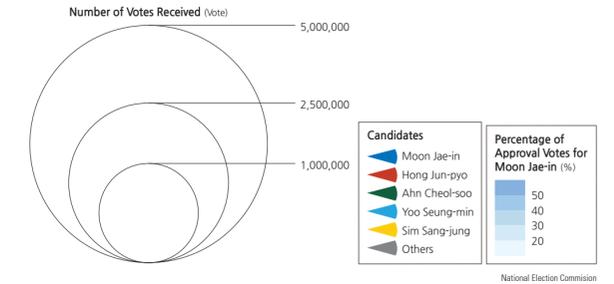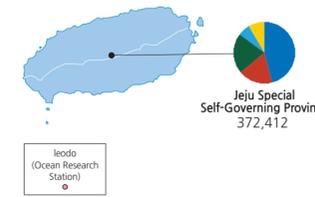
Presidential Election

Results of the 19th Presidential Election (2017)

Ulleungdo
Dokdo

Seoul 6,568,917
Incheon 1,812,963
Gyeonggi-do 7,887,645
Sejong 152,237
Chungcheongnam-do 1,233,946
Daejeon 942,301
Jeollabuk-do 1,201,003
Gwangju 954,832
Jeollanam-do 1,232,412
Gyeongsangnam-do 2,122,639
Gangwon-do 950,636
Chungcheongbuk-do 970,559
Gyeongsangbuk-do 1,701,226
Daegu 1,574,376
Ulsan 741,362
Busan 2,252,709

Percentage of Votes for Candidate Moon Jae-in

Administrative District		Percentage of Approval Votes
Gyeonggi-do	Gwacheon-si	40.6
Gyeonggi-do	Uijeongbu-si	41.0
Busan	Buk-gu	41.2
Seoul	Jung-gu	41.2
Seoul	Gangdong-gu	41.3
Incheon	Yeonsu-gu	41.4
Gyeonggi-do	Hanam-si	41.4
Busan	Sasang-gu	41.4

National Election Commission (2020)

Jeju Special Self-Governing Province 372,412

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

Number of Votes Received (Vote)
5,000,000
2,500,000
1,000,000

Candidates
Moon Jae-in
Hong Jun-pyo
Ahn Cheol-soo
Yoo Seung-min
Sim Sang-jung
Others

Percentage of Approval Votes for Moon Jae-in (%)
50 40 30 20

National Election Commission

in the Yeongnam region and Moon in the Honam region were dominant, and a fierce two-candidate battle occurred in the Seoul Metropolitan Area and the Chungcheong region.
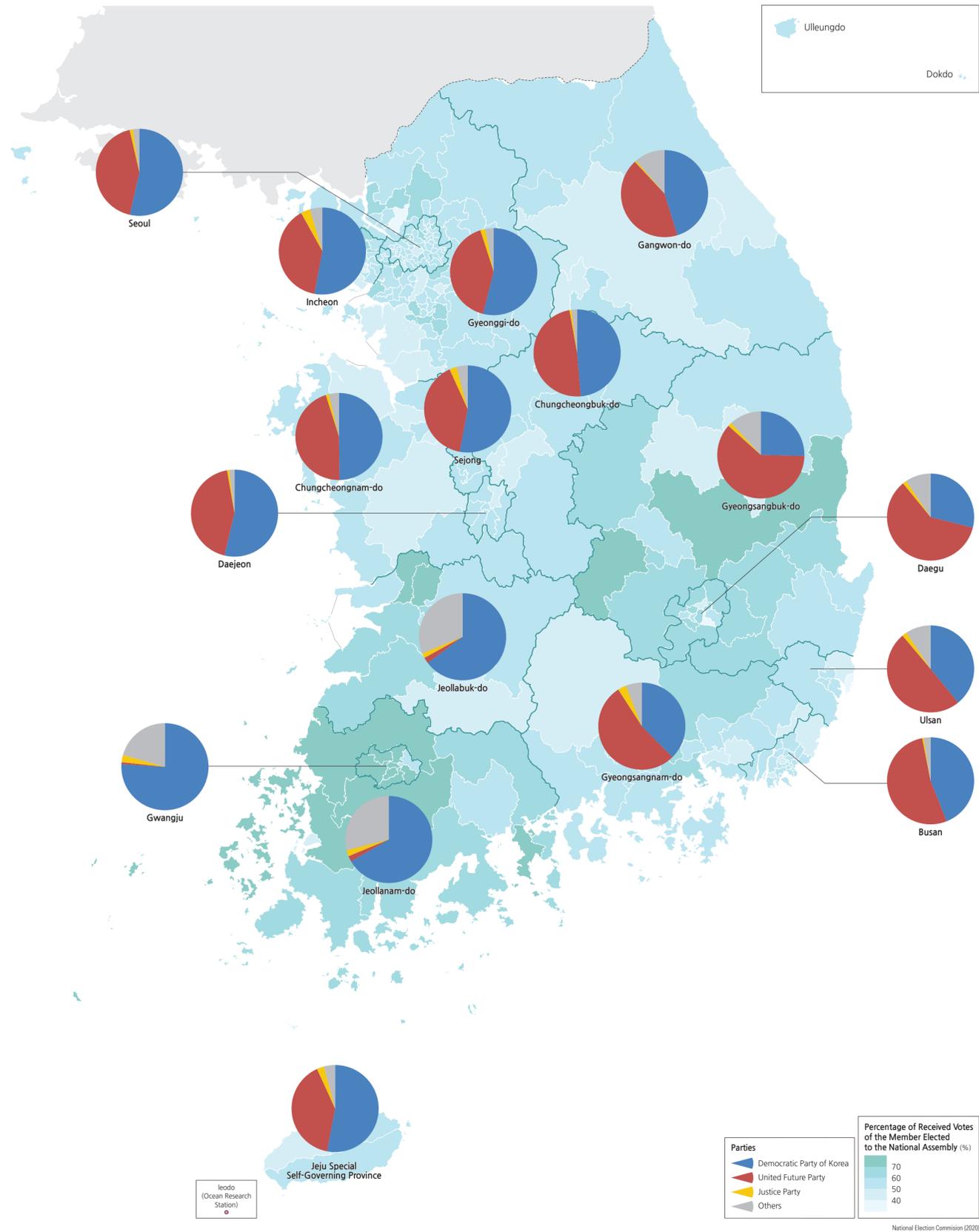
A total of 10 candidates competed in the 17th presidential election in 2007, including Lee Myung-bak of the Grand National Party, Chung Dong-young of the United New Democratic Party, and Lee Hoi-chang, who was an independent. Lee Myung-bak won with 48.76% of the vote, while Chung Dong-young received 26.14%. Lee Myung-bak took first place in all regions except the Honam region.

In the 19th presidential election, Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party of Korea received 41.1% of the votes. Jun-pyo Hong of the Liberty Korea Party, the second most voted candidate, received 24.0%. There are a few cities and districts that show results similar to the national average, such as Gwacheon, Hanam, Uijeongbu in Gyeonggi-do, Buk-gu and Sasang-gu in Busan, Jung-gu and Gangdong-gu in Seoul, Yeonsu-gu in Incheon. 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 seen 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 even 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.

Election of Members of the Natioinal Assembly

Results of the 21st National Assembly Election (2020)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Seoul

Gangwon-do

Incheon

Gyeonggi-do

Chungcheongbuk-do

Sejong

Chungcheongnam-do

Gyeongsangbuk-do

Daejeon

Daegu

Jeollabuk-do

Ulsan

Gwangju

Gyeongsangnam-do

Busan

Jeollanam-do

Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

Parties
- ■ Democratic Party of Korea
- ■ United Future Party
- ■ Justice Party
- ■ Others

Percentage of Received Votes of the Member Elected to the National Assembly (%)
70 / 60 / 50 / 40

National Election Commission (2020)

Difference between the Elected and Second-Place Candidates (2020)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Incheon
Seoul
Gyeonggi-do
Gangwon-do
Chungcheongbuk-do
Chungcheongnam-do
Sejong
Daejeon
Gyeongsangbuk-do
Daegu
Jeollabuk-do
Ulsan
Gwangju
Gyeongsangnam-do
Busan
Jeollanam-do

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)
Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

Difference in the Percentage of Votes (%)
40 / 30 / 20 / 10

National Election Commission (2020)

Wasted Votes (2020)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Incheon
Seoul
Gyeonggi-do
Gangwon-do
Chungcheongbuk-do
Chungcheongnam-do
Sejong
Daejeon
Gyeongsangbuk-do
Daegu
Jeollabuk-do
Ulsan
Gwangju
Gyeongsangnam-do
Busan
Jeollanam-do

Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

Percentage of Votes for Unsuccessful Candidates (%)
50 / 40 / 30 / 20

National Election Commission (2020)

Gender Representation in the Elected Candidates (2020)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Incheon
Seoul 37 / 12
Gangwon-do 8 / 0
Gyeonggi-do 48 / 11
Chungcheongbuk-do 8 / 0
Sejong 2 / 0
Gyeongsangbuk-do 11 / 2
Chungcheongnam-do 11 / 0
Daejeon
Daegu 11 / 0
Jeollabuk-do 10 / 0
Ulsan 6 / 0
Gwangju 7 / 1
Gyeongsangnam-do 16 / 0
Busan 16 / 2
Jeollanam-do 10 / 0

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)
Jeju Special Self-Governing Province 3 / 0

Women Elected to the National Assembly

Gwangju 1 — Daegu 1
Busan 2
Gyeonggi...
Seoul 12
Gyeonggi 11
Male 30 / 15
Female

- ■ Male
- ■ Female

National Election Commission (2020)

Age Groups of the Elected Candidates (2020)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Incheon 10 / 9 / 1
Seoul 28 / 12
Gangwon-do 6 / 2
Gyeonggi-do 34 / 14 / 11
7.7%
18.4%
23.7%
Chungcheongbuk-do 3 / 3
Chungcheongnam-do 7 / 3
Sejong
Gyeongsangbuk-do 3 / 3
18.2%
Daejeon
Daegu 7 / 5
23.1%
Jeollabuk-do 9 / 1
Ulsan 4 / 2
16.7%
Gwangju 5 / 5
Gyeongsangnam-do 11 / 4 / 1
Busan 13 / 2
6.3%
Jeollanam-do 5 / 5 / 0

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)
Jeju Special Self-Governing Province 0 / 0

Percentage of Members of National Assembly in Their 20s and 40s (%)
40 / 30 / 20 / No Data

Number of Members of National Assembly
20
- ■ Above 60s
- ■ 50s
- ■ Below 40s

National Election Commission (2020)

The ROK National Assembly is a unicameral legislature in which district representatives are elected every four years, and political parties choose representatives proportionally, by vocation and specialty, based on approval by party members. In the 21st National Assembly Election of April 2020, a total of 253 district representatives and 47 proportional representatives were elected.

The 253 district representatives include 163 seats for the Korean Democratic Party, 84 for the United Future Party, 1 for the Justice Party, and 5 independents. Representatives chosen proportionally included 17 seats for the Citizen's Party of Korea, 19 for the Future Korea Party, 5 for the Justice Party, and 3 for the Open Democratic Party.

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 won many seats in Gyeongsangbuk-do, Gyeongsangnam-do, and Gwangwon-do.
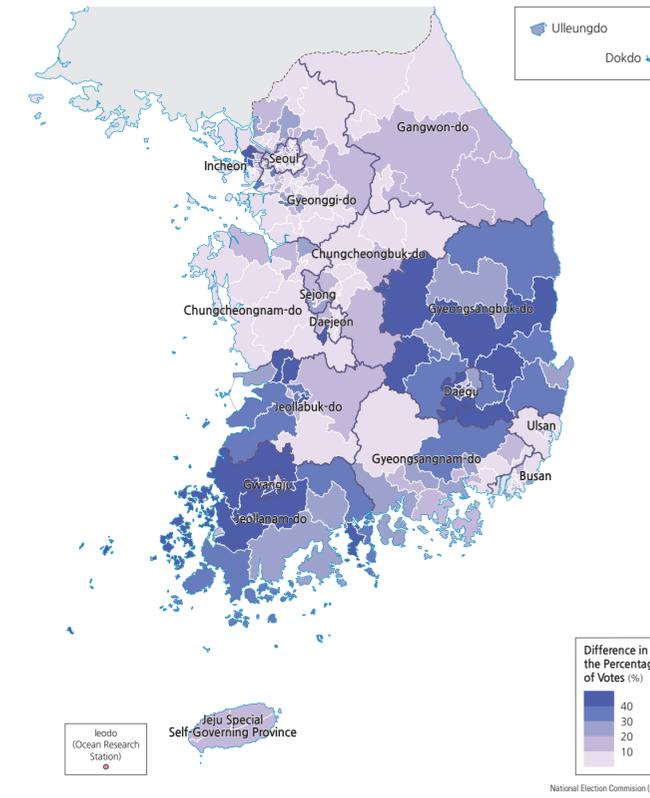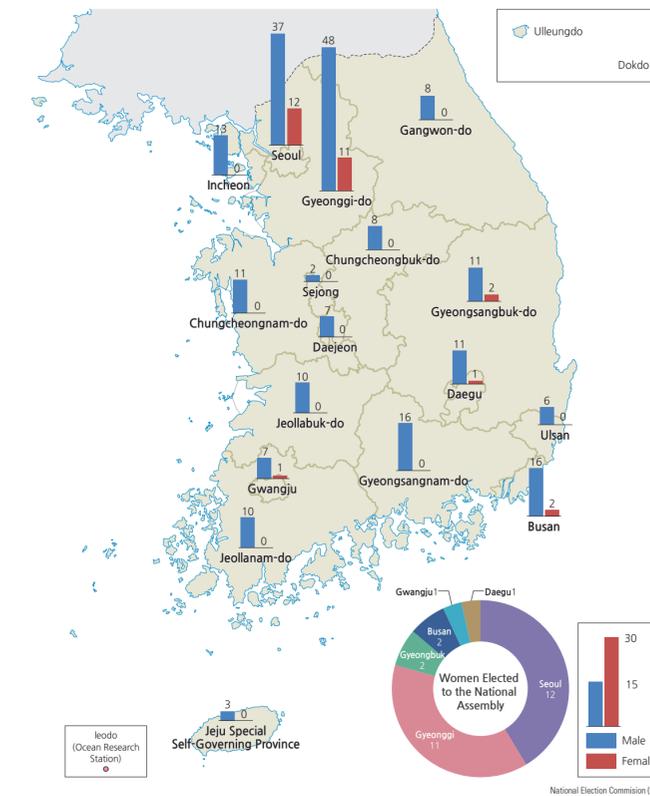
In addition, as the members of the National Assembly have adopted a single-member constituency, by which a candidate who receives a majority of votes is elected, many votes are wasted in areas where the difference in approval ratings for competing political parties is narrow. Particularly, the difference in the number of votes between the elected and second-place candidates is relatively small in the Seoul Metropolitan Area and the central region and is large in the Honam and Yeongnam regions. Therefore, in order to deal with the problem of the election system, the 21st National Assembly election introduced a new system in which some proportional representation seats are allocated to political parties with many wasted votes in the local districts.
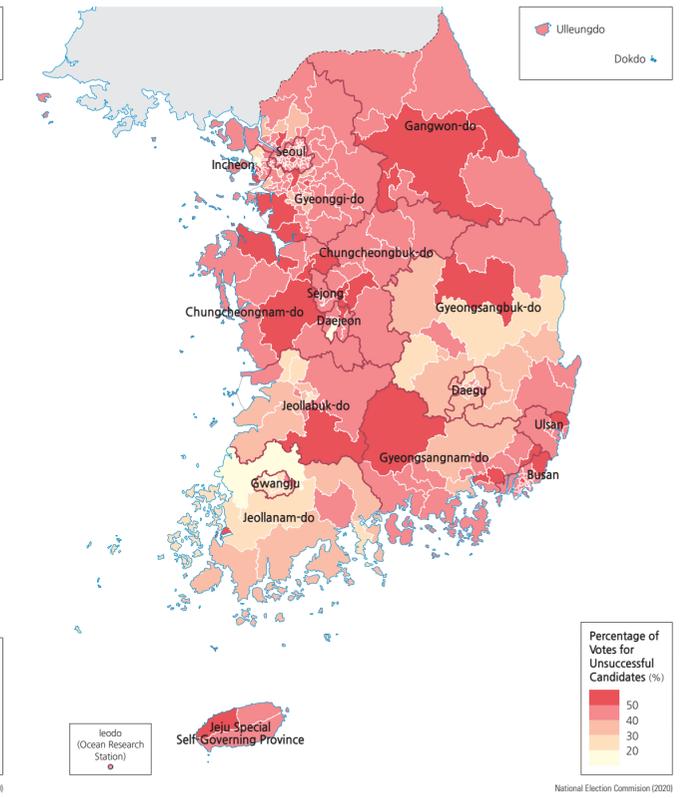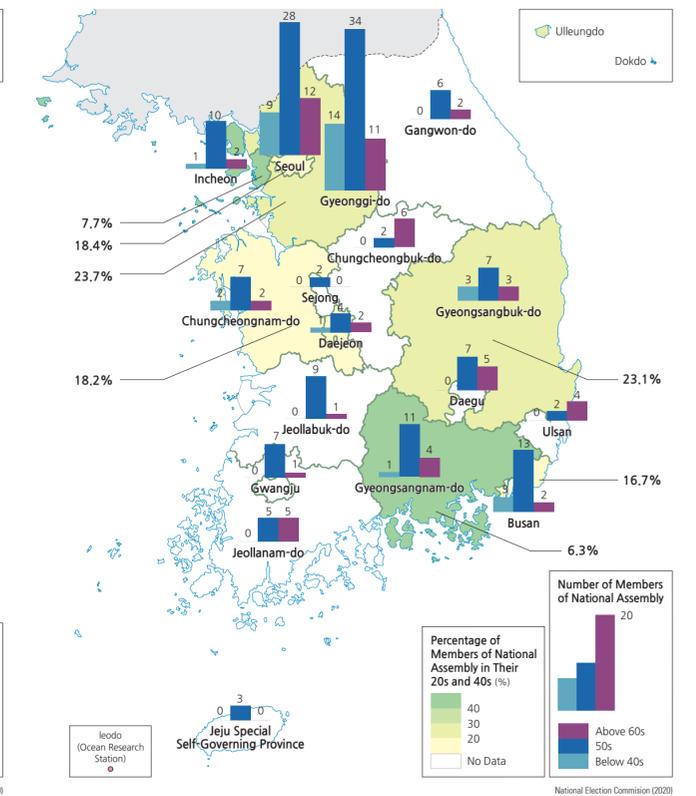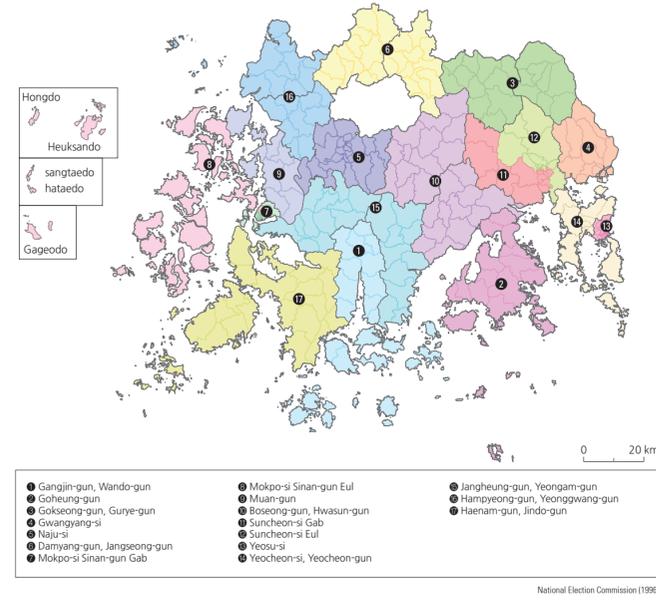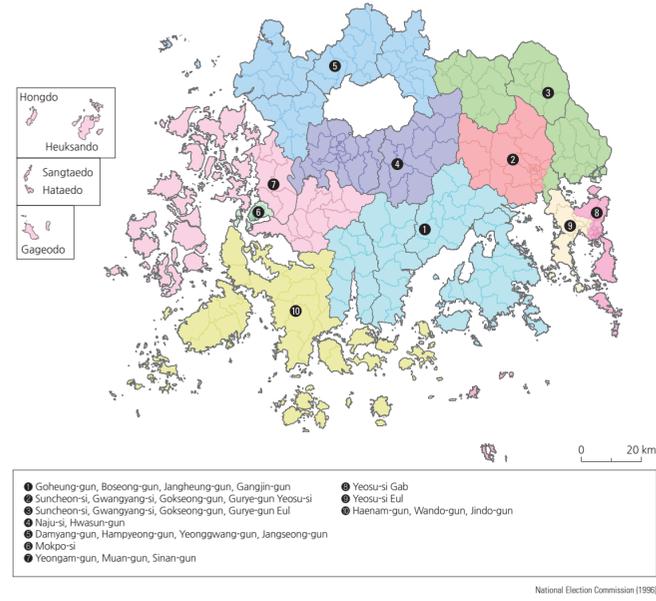
The number of women elected to the National Assembly has been increasing proportionately. However, the proportion of women elected to local positions is still low. There is also a growing demand to reflect the voices of the younger generation in politics. Recently, more representatives in their 30s and 40s are entering the National Assembly.
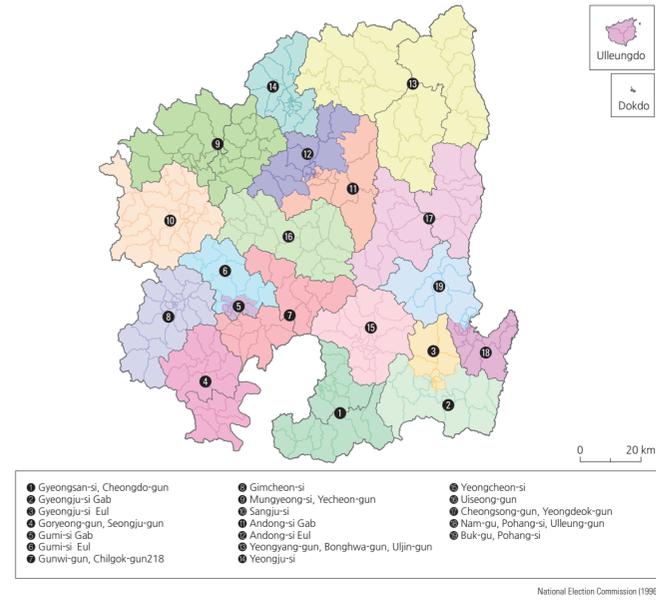
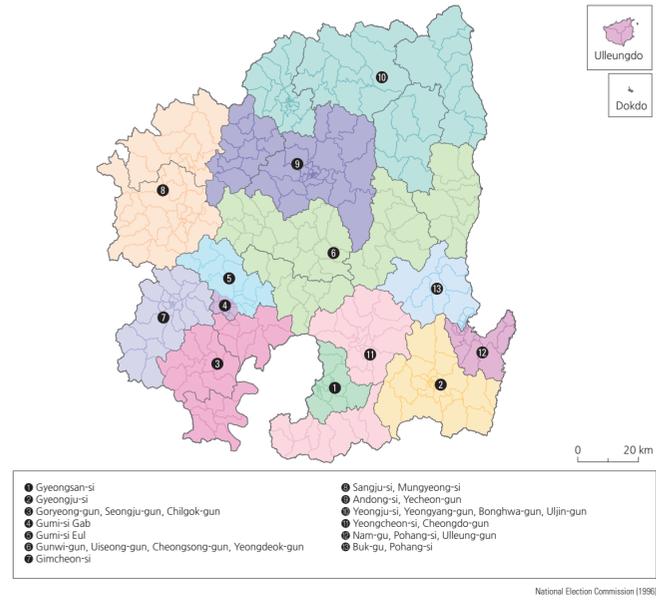## Constituencies of the National Assembly Election in Areas with Declining Population (Jeollanam-do, 1996)

0   20 km

- ① Gangjin-gun, Wando-gun
- ② Goheung-gun
- ③ Gokseong-gun, Gurye-gun
- ④ Gwangyang-si
- ⑤ Naju-si
- ⑥ Damyang-gun, Jangseong-gun
- ⑦ Mokpo-si Sinan-gun Gab
- ⑧ Mokpo-si Sinan-gun Eul
- ⑨ Muan-gun
- ⑩ Boseong-gun, Hwasun-gun
- ⑪ Suncheon-si Gab
- ⑫ Suncheon-si Eul
- ⑬ Yeosu-si
- ⑭ Yeocheon-si, Yeocheon-gun
- ⑮ Jangheung-gun, Yeongam-gun
- ⑯ Hampyeong-gun, Yeonggwang-gun
- ⑰ Haenam-gun, Jindo-gun

Constituencies of the National Assembly Election in Areas with Declining Population (Jeollanam-do, 2020)

0   20 km

- ① Goheung-gun, Boseong-gun, Jangheung-gun, Gangjin-gun
- ② Suncheon-si, Gwangyang-si, Gokseong-gun, Gurye-gun Yeosu-si
- ③ Suncheon-si, Gwangyang-si, Gokseong-gun, Gurye-gun Eul
- ④ Naju-si, Hwasun-gun
- ⑤ Damyang-gun, Hampyeong-gun, Yeonggwang-gun, Jangseong-gun
- ⑥ Mokpo-si
- ⑦ Yeongam-gun, Muan-gun, Sinan-gun
- ⑧ Yeosu-si Gab
- ⑨ Yeosu-si Eul
- ⑩ Haenam-gun, Wando-gun, Jindo-gun

Constituencies of the National Assembly Election in Areas with Declining Population (Gyeongsangbuk-do, 1996)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

0   20 km

- ① Gyeongsan-si, Cheongdo-gun
- ② Gyeongju-si Gab
- ③ Gyeongju-si Eul
- ④ Goryeong-gun, Seongju-gun
- ⑤ Gumi-si Gab
- ⑥ Gumi-si Eul
- ⑦ Gunwi-gun, Chilgok-gun218
- ⑧ Gimcheon-si
- ⑨ Mungyeong-si, Yecheon-gun
- ⑩ Sangju-si
- ⑪ Andong-si Gab
- ⑫ Andong-si Eul
- ⑬ Yeongyang-gun, Bonghwa-gun, Uljin-gun
- ⑭ Yeongju-si
- ⑮ Yeongcheon-si
- ⑯ Uiseong-gun
- ⑰ Cheongsong-gun, Yeongdeok-gun
- ⑱ Nam-gu, Pohang-si, Ulleung-gun
- ⑲ Buk-gu, Pohang-si

Constituencies of the National Assembly Election in Areas with Declining Population (Gyeongsangbuk-do, 2020)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

0   20 km

- ① Gyeongsan-si
- ② Gyeongju-si
- ③ Goryeong-gun, Seongju-gun, Chilgok-gun
- ④ Gumi-si Gab
- ⑤ Gumi-si Eul
- ⑥ Gunwi-gun, Uiseong-gun, Cheongsong-gun, Yeongdeok-gun
- ⑦ Gimcheon-si
- ⑧ Sangju-si, Mungyeong-si
- ⑨ Andong-si, Yecheon-gun
- ⑩ Andong-si, Yeongju-si, Yeongyang-gun, Bonghwa-gun, Uljin-gun
- ⑪ Yeongcheon-si, Cheongdo-gun
- ⑫ Nam-gu, Pohang-si, Ulleung-gun
- ⑬ Buk-gu, Pohang-si

Changes in the Constituency Numbers for National Assembly Elections and Seats (1996–2020)

	Seoul	Busan	Daegu	Incheon	Gwangju	Daejeon	Ulsan	Sejong	Gyeonggi	Gangwon	Chungbuk	Chungnam	Jeonbuk	Jeonnam	Gyeongbuk	Gyeongnam	Jeju	Total
The 15th National Assembly Election (1996)	47	21	13	11	6	7			38	13	8	13	14	17	19	23	3	253
The 16th National Assembly Election (2000)	45	17	11	11	6	6	5		41	9	7	11	10	13	16	16	3	227
The 17th National Assembly Election (2004)	48	18	12	12	7	6	6		49	8	8	10	11	13	15	17	3	243
The 18th National Assembly Election (2008)	48	18	12	12	8	6	6		51	8	8	10	11	12	15	17	3	245
The 19th National Assembly Election (2012)	48	18	12	12	8	6	6	1	52	9	8	10	11	11	15	16	3	246
The 20th National Assembly Election (2016)	49	18	12	13	8	7	6	1	60	8	8	11	10	10	13	16	3	253
The 21st National Assembly Election (2020)	49	18	12	12	8	7	6	1	59	8	8	11	10	10	13	16	3	253

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 constituency has often been carried out just before elections. Followed by the verdict of the Constitutional Court, which sets an upper limit for the proportion of voters between the largest population constituency and the lowest population constituency, the constituencies, particularly in rural areas and old central business districts with small populations, have been realigned and merged. For example, in Jeollanam-do and Gyeongsangbuk-do, where population decline is evident, two to three administrative districts were merged to form a new constituency, and some regions of urban and rural counties were divided and re-aligned to form a new constituency. This realignment led to an inconsistency between administrative districts and constituencies for the National Assembly, undermined regional representation, and excessively expanded the area of the constituency in which administrative districts were merged.
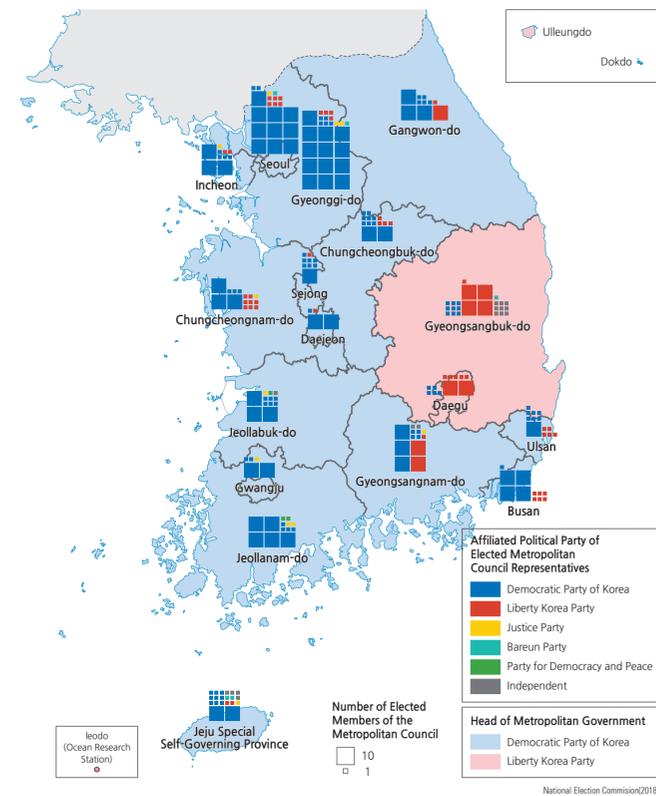
Local Election

In local elections (every four years), local and metropolitan council members and heads of local and metropolitan governments are chosen. Council members consist of district representatives and proportional representatives.
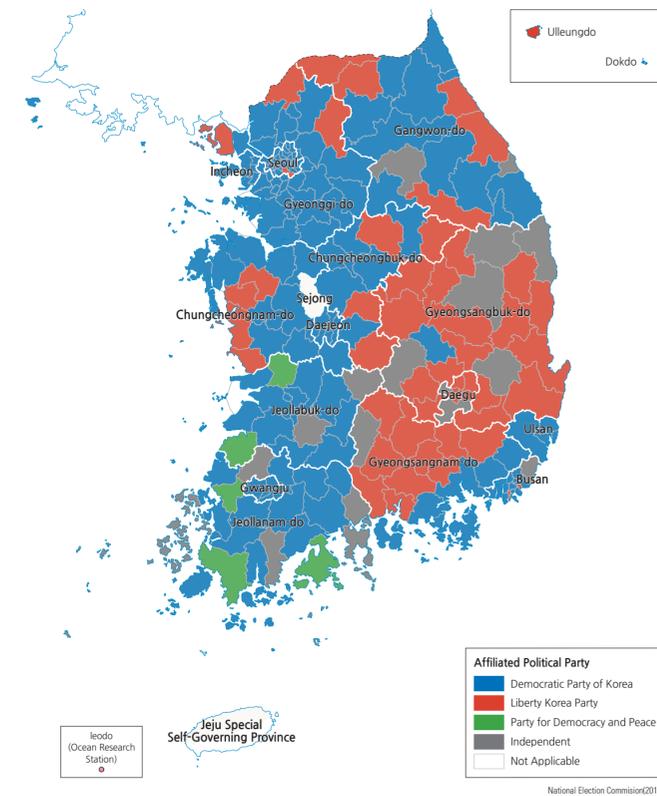
In the 7th Simultaneous Local Election of 2018, 14 candidates from the Democratic Party of Korea, two from the Liberty Korea Party, and one independent were elected as mayors and governors of metropolitan cities and provinces. In the election of the metropolitan council, the ruling party secured many seats; 652 candidates from the Democratic Party of Korea and 137 from the Liberty Korea Party. As the result of the election for the heads of local government, 151 candidates from the Democratic Party of Korea, 53 from the Liberty Korea Party, five from the Party for Democracy and Peace, and 17 independents were elected as mayors, county heads, and district heads. Regarding the result of the local council election, 2926 council members were elected with the exception of Sejong Metropolitan Autonomous City and Jeju Special Self-governing Province, where local councils are not established. The local council is the foundation for grassroots democracy and accommodates diverse constituencies, including women and members of the younger generation.
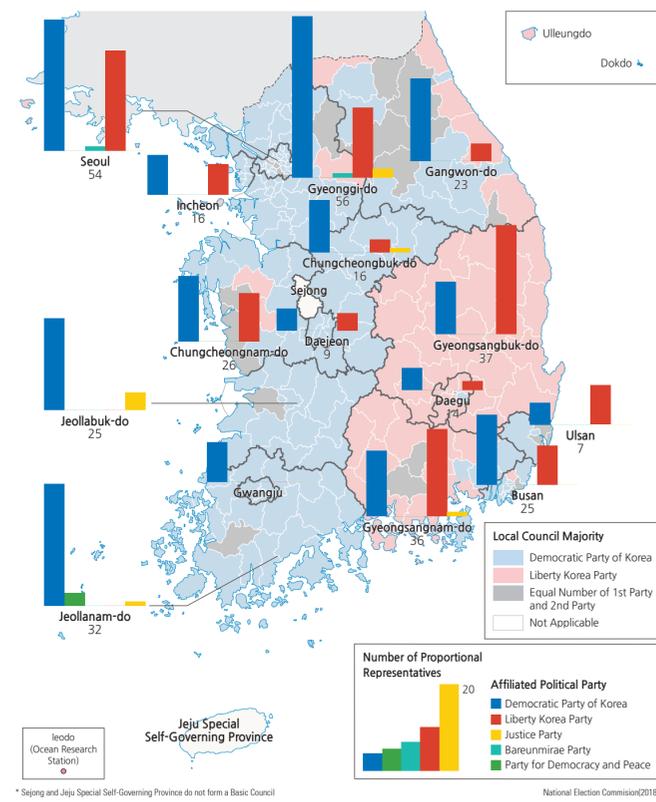
Results of the 7th Local Election: Heads of Metropolitan Governments and Councils (2018)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Affiliated Political Party of Elected Metropolitan Council Representatives
- Democratic Party of Korea
- Liberty Korea Party
- Justice Party
- Bareun Party
- Party for Democracy and Peace
- Independent

Head of Metropolitan Government
- Democratic Party of Korea
- Liberty Korea Party

Number of Elected Members of the Metropolitan Council
10
1

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

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

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Affiliated Political Party
- Democratic Party of Korea
- Liberty Korea Party
- Party for Democracy and Peace
- Independent
- Not Applicable

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

Results of the 7th Local Election: Representative of Local Councils (2018)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Seoul 54
Incheon 16
Gyeonggi-do 36
Gangwon-do 23
Chungcheongbuk-do 16
Sejong
Chungcheongnam-do 26
Daejeon
Jeollabuk-do 25
Gyeongsangbuk-do 37
Daegu
Ulsan 7
Gwangju
Gyeongsangnam-do 36
Busan 25
Jeollanam-do 32

Local Council Majority
- Democratic Party of Korea
- Liberty Korea Party
- Equal Number of 1st Party and 2nd Party
- Not Applicable

Number of Proportional Representatives
20

Affiliated Political Party
- Democratic Party of Korea
- Liberty Korea Party
- Justice Party
- Bareunmirae Party
- Party for Democracy and Peace

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)

Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

* Sejong and Jeju Special Self-Governing Province do not form a Basic Council

Gender Representation in the Local Councils (2018)

Ulleungdo

Dokdo

Incheon
Seoul
Gyeonggi-do
Gangwon-do
Chungcheongbuk-do
Sejong
Chungcheongnam-do
Daejeon
Gyeongsangbuk-do
Jeollabuk-do
Daegu
Ulsan
Gwangju
Gyeongsangnam-do
Busan
Jeollanam-do

Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

Percentage of Female Local Council Members
- 50
- 40
- 30
- 20
- 10
- Not Applicable

Ieodo (Ocean Research Station)