

Curtailing Political Parties Efficiently: The Policy Decision to Abolish Party Chapters in South Korea

Hannes B. Mosler¹

Summary

This article deals with the policy decision process leading to the abolishment of party chapters in South Korea. Why and how the 'party on the ground' came to be banned by law twenty years after formal democratization is a puzzling question, since the institution of party chapters is key to achieving the central task that political parties have of translating the political will of the people into actual policy, and because parties are (therefore) constitutionally required to have the 'necessary means' to do so. While the justification for the abolishment can obviously be traced back to corruption and abuse of power at the election-district level, a systematic analysis of the decision-making process has been largely neglected in academic literature. The author of this article, however, has scrutinized the policy decision from a long-term perspective, doing so by way of discourse analysis in order to obtain a grounded understanding of the dynamics behind it and to provide insights for further theoretical inquiry and possible practical application.

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1. Introduction

In the Republic of Korea (hereafter 'South Korea'), party chapters² were the basic regional party organization 'on the ground' for over forty years until they were abolished in 2004. Many of them were sites of malpractice and corruption, making them a target of demands for 'less costly and more efficient' politics and political parties. Starting in the early 1990s, it took about a decade of repeated debating to

¹ The author is a full-time lecturer and research assistant at the Institute of Korean Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, where he has been working since 2009. He received his PhD from the Political Science Department of Seoul National University in 2011. This paper is an extract taken from his doctoral thesis. The author would like to express his appreciation to three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and invaluable suggestions regarding this paper. He also thanks Stephen Deutsch for his proofreading and this journal's copy editor for his professional support. Any remaining errors are, of course, the author's sole responsibility. The work on this paper was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies of the Republic of Korea (AKS-2009-MA-1001).

² The author of this article decided to use 'party chapter' as his translation of the Korean word *chigudang*, which can be literally translated as '(election) district party (organization).'