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

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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.

1. Introduction

In the Republic of Korea (hereafter ‘South Korea’), party chapters 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