

Women's Power in the Age of Localization

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On June 2, 2010, local elections were held nationwide in Korea.

Korea's first direct popular elections for local autonomy were conducted in 1995. Before then, local government leaders had been appointed by the authorities. From that time on, the country began to fully enjoy the revitalization of local communities. The recent elections in June marked the country's fifth popular local government elections.

The number of women constituents is slightly larger than that of men. In the June elections, however, the national average turnouts of men and women stood at 55.1% and 54.7%, respectively, with a gap of 0.4% points. In Chung Cheong Nam-Do, the turnouts of men and women were 59.1% and 56.8%, respectively, with a gap of 2.3% points. Thus, the turnout of men was larger than that of women.

As you may know, policy-decision makers and council members, who discuss budgets to better promote policies, play a critical role in local autonomy. Moreover, to realize an ideal gender-equal society, it is essential that women actively participate in policy-decision processes. Women with decision-making authority, such as female politicians, government officials and committee members, play important roles.

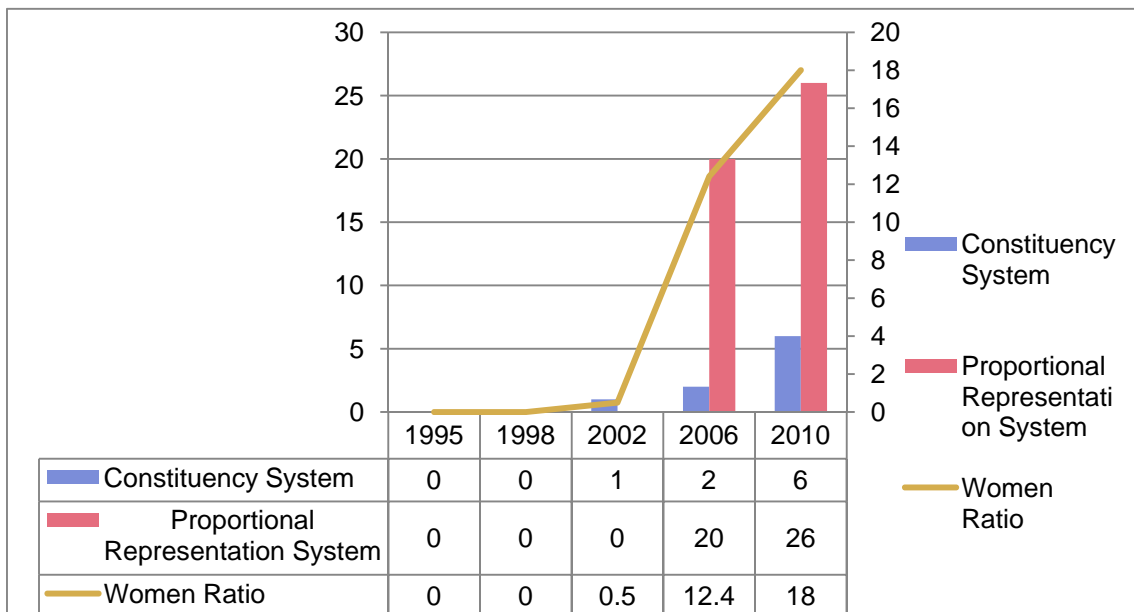
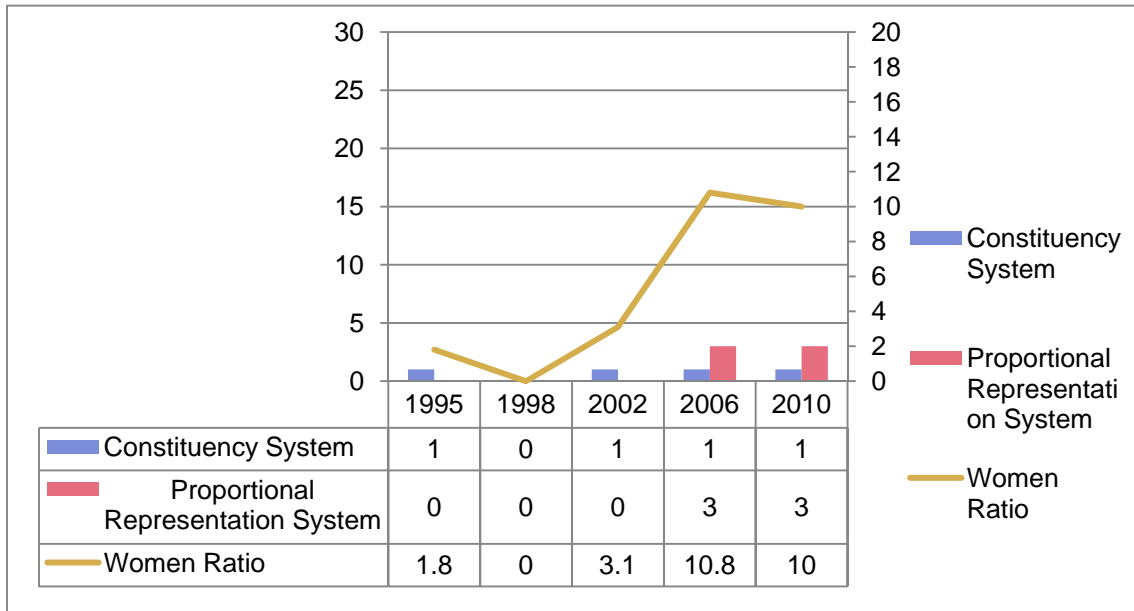
At the local elections in June, however, the ratio of women among province council representatives of Chung Cheong Nam-Do, a metropolitan municipality, reached 10.8%. Also, the ratio of women among district council representatives of the province's autonomous areas, cities and counties, which are basic municipalities ranked below province, is now 18%. Of these women representatives, the ratio of those elected under the constituency system is only 3.7%. If such representatives seek to advocate on behalf of women, these figures are far too small. On the other hand, the elections had some good results for women. The number of women district council representatives elected under constituency system increased threefold, from 2 to 6 in 2006.

Especially since 2006, when the Proportional Representation Official Nomination Quota System¹ was initiated, the number of representatives elected under the proportional representation system increased, leading to a significant increase in the number of female district council representatives. This increase is due not only to the change in women's way of thinking, but also to the change in systems, which indicates that top-down approaches are still influential in Korean society.

1. Korea's public officers' election act requires that the ratio of each party's women candidates must exceed a designated percentage.

For future challenges, it is necessary to create an environment in which women have a strong interest in politics. It is also important that women should play a pivotal role in solving their problems and vote for women candidates.

Women Local Council Representatives in Chung Cheong Nam-Do (1995 – 2010)



Resource: Central Election Management Committee, Past Election Information System
Each Period