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# The Effectiveness of Early Voting – A Case Study of the Republic of Korea

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## Abstract

In 2013 the National Election Commission (NEC) introduced early voting for the first time during by-elections, and first implemented them nationwide in local elections in 2014. This system allows voters to cast their ballot at any polling station across the country on the Friday and Saturday preceding the election day itself without any separate registration. This year saw record early voting turnout (26.6%) during presidential elections in May. This paper analyses how this system works, what its necessary components are and how effective it has been.

Research into the effect of this introduction of early voting can be compared to the early voting or pre-poll voting in other countries. For example, a study by Blais et al for Elections Canada on the potential impacts of extended advance voting on voter turnout found that early forms of voting tended to benefit the elderly most and 'had a positive impact on turnout, but that the effect is somewhat weak and uncertain.' In addition, Franklin in various work (1996, 2002, 2006) has also noted the potential high increase in voter turnout if voting methods are increased and elections take place on a Sunday, and this should be directly compared to the impact of opening voting on Friday and Saturday as well as on election day (Wednesday) in Korea. It is also worth exploring the effect on voter turnout in comparison to the adoption of an all-postal system, which both Norris and James found could significantly increase convenience and turnout (James, 2011; Norris, 2003) This paper uses the Korean case to compare and contrast the effects of the introduction of early voting with other research of this kind to find if the data concurs with results found in other countries.

## *A Change of Focus: Why Study South Korea's Early Voting System?*

Election administration in general remains an overlooked area of political science, particularly research on countries other than the US and the UK. However, other more recently established democracies around the world are developing innovative election processes and administration methods that suit their culture and environment, and these methods are worthy of detailed research to discover which systems work well and which systems can be developed further and feasibly be used in other countries. The study of constant testing and innovation of various systems in different environments will allow researchers in election administration to come closer to some form of consensus on best practices and guidelines to make voting as convenient and accessible as possible.

One of the countries that has made such innovations in their election administration is the Republic of Korea.<sup>1</sup> Since the country was restored to a fully democratic republic in 1988, there have been a number of developments in election administration that have been led by the National Election Commission (NEC), the election management body responsible for the administration of elections at all levels in the country. For example, local elections were reformed in the early 1990's so that elections for all levels of local government now take place simultaneously and in a unified format, overseas voting was first made available in the early 2000's and optical scan ballot sorting machines have been introduced to significantly reduce the time it takes to count ballots. However, one of the most significant developments was the introduction of early voting in 2014. This system allows any registered voter to cast their ballot for two days (beginning five days before election day itself) at any polling station around the country without prior or special registration.

This paper argues that the introduction of early voting has in general been a success in two ways. Firstly, although the early voting system has not itself increased turnout, the convenience it has created for voters has at least contributed to rebounding voter turnout since 2014, especially among voters under the age of 30. The political climate since the presidential election of 2012 has seen more young people interested in politics in general, and the early voting system has facilitated their introduction into the election system, and although the increase in voter turnout may have been modest in the past three elections the long-term effect will be to ensure turnout remains relatively high. Secondly, the introduction of a system that allows people to vote from any polling station around the country has brought election administration up to speed with modern lifestyle in South Korea. Korea has undergone massive and relatively sudden demographic change over the last 20 years which has needed a response by election administrators. Given that postal voting is not an option due to the lack of trust among politicians and the public due to its troubled past in South Korea, this early voting system has offered a strong alternative that has been part of halting the downward trend in voter turnout and responding to the demographic challenges now facing administrators of all kinds in the country. Early voting has stopped people falling the net. This paper hopes to show other forms of alternative voting other than postal voting are plausible and should be considered.

This paper hopes to be part of continued research into the election administration of countries that have more recently transitioned into full democracies such as South Korea. I believe that the conclusions of this research and others like it are more helpful to young democracies and those election management bodies still defining their mandates and finding the best system that fits their circumstances when compared to research on the election systems of the USA or Western European nations. This is because election management bodies in places like South Korea have faced similar

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<sup>1</sup> Will be referred to as South Korea or simply Korea for the remainder of the paper.

challenges to other transitional countries more recently when compared to the those in countries such as the UK and the USA. The NEC in Korea still has institutional memory of undergoing that transition, and indeed many of the senior management have worked through the early process of moving towards full democracy. This means policies and decisions made by the NEC, the background of those decisions and their outcomes are all more applicable to young democracies. Additionally, most countries in Western Europe and the USA have very decentralized election management systems or place administration in the hands local bodies, resulting in a whole host of election systems within one country, or in the hands of governmental body or Ministry. For example, in her extensive look at the US election system after the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, Gerken highlighted that the US system is dysfunctional due to its highly decentralized nature (Gerken, 2009). This is very different to most young democracies, who centralize the mandate in the hands of a national election management body as South Korea has done. This makes studying South Korea election management more applicable and useful research to young democracies who use a similar method. The introduction of early voting in South Korea shows that these election management bodies in younger democracies should continue to develop their administration systems as they face tough demographic changes.

Finally, it should be noted that this paper should only be the beginning of research on this topic and is in no way a complete analysis of early voting. For example, there is no regression analysis on how many voters who used early voting were mainly motivated by the increased convenience or if they would have voted on election day anyway. There is also a lack of survey data on the public satisfaction and opinion on the early voting system, something the NEC has indicated it will continue to improve in the future. This paper does not claim to offer a comprehensive study on the effects of early voting, but it does provide a base for further research and study and it seeks to encourage further research into alternative forms of voting used in both Korea and other younger democracies.

### *Alternative Voting Methods: A Literature Review*

There are a wide variety of studies focused on different forms of election management, far too many to review on here. But for the purposes of this paper I will focus on previous studies on alternative forms of voting, especially on similar systems to the Korean one. It is in this context it is possible to compare this research, either focused on the UK and the US or a comparative study of a vast number of systems, with evidence found regarding the early voting system in Korea.

One of the most researched and discussed forms of alternative voting is postal voting. Used widely in Europe and North America, postal voting has become the backbone of alternative voting in most established democracies over the last decade. For example, 16.9% of voters, or 6.2 million people, cast their ballot by post during the 2015 general election in the UK (Uberoi, 2015). Norris is one of the scholars that has often been glowing about the possible effects of postal voting being made available to all registered voters, arguing that it is especially effective for those that have difficulties getting to a polling station (Norris, 2005).

The idea of making voting all postal has also been endorsed by a number of researchers. For example, James' study claims that the introduction of an all-postal system will have a "significant effect on voter turnout" and after an evaluation of studies on all postal voting he claims there is "considerable evidence" that turnout can be increased significantly despite some studies expressing scepticism (James, 2011). After a number of pilot studies of all-postal voting in local elections in the UK, it was also trialled in general elections in 2015. A parliamentary report found that nearly all (97%) of those respondents who voted by post reported that they were satisfied with voting in this way. The report recommended that, despite some reservations regarding voters' options expressed by the Electoral

Commission in previous reports, all-postal voting should be seriously considered for future elections. (Uberoi, 2015).

However, some issues have been apparent regarding public confidence in postal voting, either on-demand or in all-postal forms. This is best expressed by Norris, who sounds a word of warning regarding the introduction of postal voting to everyone when analysing the British case.

*“Popular hopes for the impact of postal-voting-on demand were dashed because too much was expected of too little, and the underlying causes of voter turnout were underestimated. Moreover because of the cases of electoral fraud associated with postal voting in certain areas, and the widespread publicity these developments received in the news media, this change raised broader doubts about the security and integrity of the electoral process. The potential benefits of reforms to established practices need to be carefully weighed because, beyond any potential gains for special needs groups, the implementation of this initiative also carries the risk of generating some serious negative externalities for confidence in the British electoral process.”* (Norris, 2005)

This highlights the issue that even proponents of postal voting acknowledge to be true and is most relevant to this study. Although it may be shown to increase turnout and make voting more convenient, there is always the possibility that it can significantly reduce confidence in the electoral process. That is to say even if little voter fraud is detected in reality, the perception that the process can be tampered with or can be unreliable makes its use redundant. Other sceptics focus on data that shows the boost to turnout is not as much as first thought include Gronke and Miller, who conducted a comparison of counties in Washington that use postal voting and those that do not. They found postal voting on average increased voter turnout by less than 5%, which they concluded was simply a modest increase. Regardless of turnout issues though, in the Korean case the public confidence issue is the most important, so this study will look at if early voting also experiences a modest increase in turnout.

There have also been several studies focused on various forms of early voting in the United States, which have shown mixed results. For example, Fitzgerald is generally sceptical about the effect it has had. In his study he found that early voting had a limited effect on voter turnout and he argued that more open forms of registration were more effective at increasing turnout rather than offering early voting (Fitzgerald, 2005). Studies by Franklin also have proved inconclusive on advanced voting. In his early work his research found providing special provisions and advanced voting increased turnout by four percentage points (Franklin, 1996). However, a later book he published found that the same options for voters provided no noticeable effects when explaining the differences in turnout with the previous elections in established democracies (Franklin, 2004).

In another study, Burden et al look at the effects of costs of early voting and different registration methods introduced in the 2008 elections in the USA and they were far more upbeat on improved registration procedures than early voting or mail-in voting. In fact, they found that early voting in the US in 2008 actually lowered turnout when it was not combined with the introduction of election day voter registration. In addition, they argue that offering forms of early voting ‘imposes significant burdens on the election officials charged with administering new approaches, especially in smaller towns with limited resources’ (Burden, Canon, Mayer, & Moynihan, 2009). Therefore when analysing

early voting in Korea it will also be important to look at the administrative costs to find if any similar issues.<sup>2</sup>

In other relevant work, Blais et al. found that increased “ease of voting,” meaning the option to vote by mail, in advance or by proxy, had a fairly strong effect on turnout, estimating that a country that has all three of those options would experience an average increase in turnout of 11% when compared to countries with none of those options available (Blais, Massicotte, & Dobrzynska, 2003). However, when they studied advanced voting in Canada, they found the option of early voting was mainly be taken up by those already more likely to vote, mainly among the older generations, and if advanced voting is expanded then still “the mobilizing function of parties could become crucial to realizing gains in participation” (Blais, Dobrzynska, & Loewen, 2007). Norris also look at the effect of various forms of alternative voting in various countries and found that although the number of days a polling station was open did have a positive effect on turnout, other alternative forms of voting did not have such an effect (Norris, 2002). Overall, the general consensus among scholars is that early voting has a fairly moderate effect on voter turnout and that other aspects are more important when it comes to changing turnout such as the type of voter registration system and mobilization by political parties.

One country that has a comparable early voting system is Iceland, where early voting starts eight weeks before the election day, and you may cast a ballot in any polling station across the country by writing the candidates name on a blank ballot paper. In the early voting station, there are ballot boxes for each province, and you drop your ballot paper into the relevant ballot box after sealing it in an envelope. These ballots are then counted together on election day with regular ballots. Turnout in Icelandic elections has been as high as 85% in 2009 (12% early voting) and 81.5% in 2012 (13% early voting). However, some major differences in the systems should be noted. Icelandic early voting is a long-established feature of the political landscape and the system mainly comes out of necessity due to the unique geographical and demographic challenges the Icelandic Election Commission faces. Previous OSCE/ODHIR observations have also been quite critical of Iceland’s early voting system due to the fact it begins before the candidate’s list has been finalized and requires the voter to write the candidate’s name on a blank piece of paper. (OSCE/ODIHR, 2009, 2013). The fact voter’s do not know the final list of candidates also risks any comparison as it makes it less likely a voter will want to cast their ballot, and the lack of scholarly analysis of the effect of this system on turnout in this remote country also hampers any potential to cross analyse the cases.

There are also some other factors that should be considered when discussing early voting in Korea. For example, demographics and the political system may also be having an effect on its viability. In a comprehensive look at voter turnout, Stockemer found that “On the one hand, proportional representation, unicameralism and a small population size boost turnout in both developed and developing countries.” (Stockemer, 2015) With all three of these being true for Korea in comparison to other major democracies that have been the subject of election management studies, they are a factor for the higher turnout in Korea relative to other established democracies. Also, Korea does not run concurrent general elections, with Presidential, National Assembly and local elections always held separately. Clark in his study on election administration in Britain found that “holding different types of elections at the same time leads to lower quality election administration across Britain” (Clark, 2016). It should be noted early voting in Korea is not hampered by the difficulty of holding multiple different elections at the same time, therefore easing the pressure on administrators. In addition, the factor of ethnicity and voter turnout is almost totally irrelevant in the Korean case as the country is

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<sup>2</sup>Although it should be noted here that election administration in Korea is far more centralized than in the USA, with the NEC overseeing all forms of election management.

mostly homogenous. Anyway, other studies of Asian nations find very little association between turnout of ethnic demographics. As noted by Schraufnagel et al, they believe that “the reason for the weak association between fragmentation and voter turnout is because voter mobilization along ethnic lines is rare” in the Asian countries they studied (Schraufnagel, Buehler, & Lowry-fritz, 2014), and Korea is no different in this respect. When understanding the effect of early voting in comparison with countries such as the United States and when considering the possibility of using the Korean system in more emerging democracies it should be noted this factor is non-existent in Korea.

### *Early Voting in the Republic of Korea: Anywhere for Everyone*

Before beginning to analyse the effects of the early voting system used in the Republic of Korea since nationwide simultaneous local elections in 2014, it is helpful to outline exactly how the system works, discuss the overall costs involved and the various equipment required. The idea of early voting in the Republic of Korea is that any voter can vote at any polling station around the country for two days, beginning five days before election day. Elections in Korea are usually scheduled for a Wednesday, which is designated as a national holiday, and therefore early voting normally takes place on a Friday and Saturday.<sup>3</sup> To the voter, the system is a very simple one as no separate registration is necessary and the voting takes place in nearly exactly the same way as it does on election day. In Korea, voter registration is automatic and is managed by local governments through the computerized residential registration system and as long as the voter is on the electoral register they may take part in early voting.

When a voter goes into an early voting polling station, there are two lines that distinguish the voters according to their residency. The first line is for voters who are casting their ballot in their registered station according to their residence and the second is for voters casting a ballot outside their registered station. For the voters using their registered polling station, there is no difference in the voting method and administration from election day. The voter’s ID is checked on the register, they are given a pre-prepared ballot and they may either sign or use a fingerprint to confirm they have received a ballot and will vote. However, for those voting outside their registered polling station there are two major differences. Firstly, ballots cannot be pre-prepared for National Assembly elections and local elections as it would require a large number of ballot papers to be printed and stored which may well go to waste. Instead, when the voter’s ID is checked on the voter’s list, the ballot paper for their registered district is printed out in the polling station and handed to voter. Secondly, the voter is also given an envelope that is pre-addressed to the Election Commission who is responsible for counting the ballots in their registered constituency. Once the voter has marked the ballot paper in the voting booth, they place it into the envelope before dropping into the ballot box. Once voting is completed, the envelopes containing ballot papers are sent to the relevant Election Commission who store them under 24-hour CCTV surveillance to be counted along with other ballot papers on election day itself.

There are two elements that are essential to making this system work. The first is the integrated voters list, or nationwide electoral register. In Korea, local governments (supervised by the NEC) are responsible for drawing up the voters lists, and all citizens within the jurisdiction of the relevant local government are automatically registered to vote as long as they are eligible to do so. Before 2014, each constituency would have a separate voters list managed independently of each other, but to allow for voting anywhere across the country these registers had to be integrated together. Therefore, once the local governments have created their voters lists, they are brought together onto one server by

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<sup>3</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> presidential election was a special election held due to the impeachment of the president and was held on Tuesday because by law it must have been held within 60 days of the impeachment.

the NEC. Each voter ID station is linked to this server and therefore can identify any registered person from around the country, allowing for a voter to cast a ballot at any polling station. The voter is then marked on the server to indicate they have cast a ballot, which prevents double voting either at another polling station during early voting or on election day itself.

The second cornerstone of the early voting system is the ballot paper printer that the NEC designed and had produced itself. It is present in every early voting polling station and is programmed to be able to print out a ballot paper from any constituency, which is required for both National Assembly and local elections as it would be impossible for a polling station to store the required hundreds of different ballots. In addition, this ballot paper printer is multi-purpose, as they are also used to print ballots for overseas voting and special home voting. Overall the adoption of the early voting system has in affect resulted in the modernization of the entire election process.

In terms of cost, each printer costs the NEC \$1,700 USD (2 million Korean won)<sup>4</sup> to manufacture, and this is done by an outsourced Korean IT solutions company. Based on this year's presidential election, administering this early voting system is estimated to cost the NEC \$30 million USD (35 billion Korean won) more per election including the costs of maintaining and running the election equipment required, operating the integrated voters list and paying the polling staff.<sup>5</sup> With 3,507 early voting stations across the country, this means the costs work out at approximately \$8,700 USD per polling station (10 million Korean won) over the two days. This increase is not out of line with the increases in election administration costs if postal voting is introduced or becomes more popular, with a IFES/UNDP report noting that the costs involved with sending information and ballots leading to postal voting being an expensive option, citing examples in Spain and Switzerland (Center for Transitional and Post-Conflict Governance IFES & Bureau for Development Policy UNDP, 2006).

Before analysing the outcomes of the introduction of early voting, it is also worthwhile understanding some other aspects of the overall nature of the Korean electoral system. There are three main types of elections for public office which are never held on the same day. Presidential elections are held every five years unless the incumbent is impeached, and no President may serve more than a single term. These elections usually produce the highest turnout and the President is elected by a simple majority. National Assembly elections are held every four years and use a mixed system, with 253 seats elected in single-member districts by first-past-the-post and 47 members elected by a closed-list proportional representation system. Lastly, local elections at various levels are held together in what are called nationwide simultaneous local elections, which are held every four years.<sup>6</sup> In National Assembly elections each voter receives two ballots and during local elections the voter may receive upwards of six ballot papers depending on the circumstances in their constituency and if any referenda are also held at the same time.

In terms of election administration, according to a model set out by James, Korea's election system and procedures are overall on the expansive side.<sup>7</sup> For example, voters are automatically registered to vote and election day itself is a public holiday, which James estimates to increase the chances of a person voting from six to nine percentage points and three to six points respectively. Incidentally, the model predicts that using universal advance voting and 'voting centres,' which is probably the closest

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<sup>4</sup> All figures in USD are approximate

<sup>5</sup> Each voter ID and ballot paper section requires one notebook PC (for identifying the voter on the voters list), an identification pad and a ballot paper printer. The smallest early voting polling station had two of these sections, whilst the largest had 16. The average number was 3.

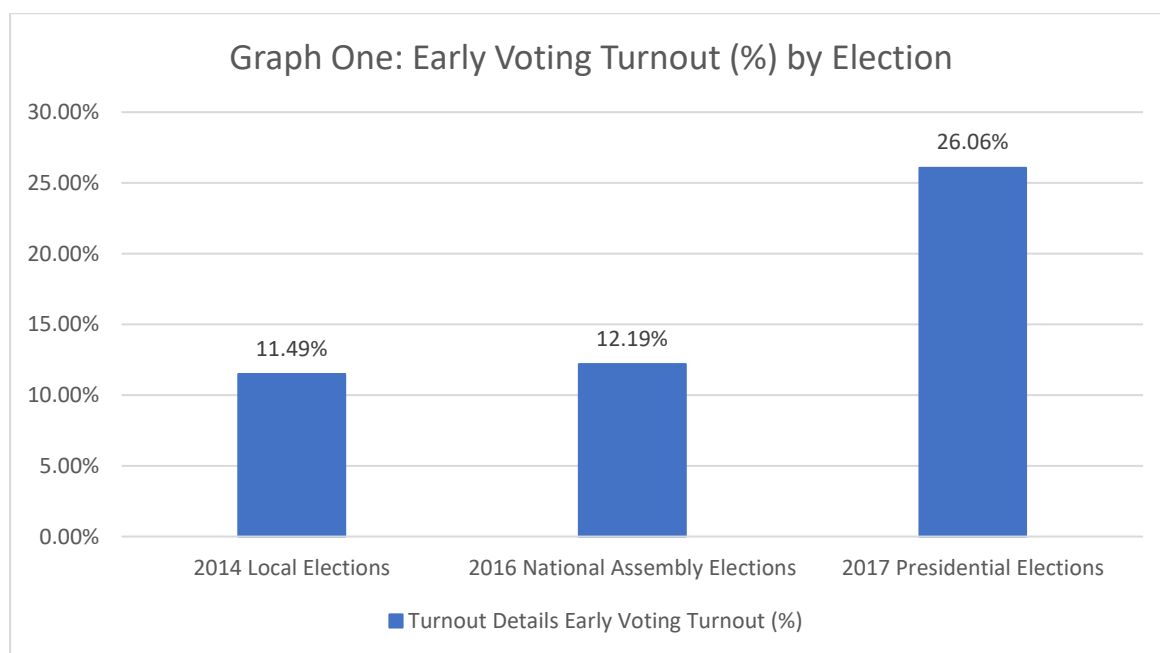
<sup>6</sup> Voters elect Majors and Governors, Provincial/City Councils, Heads of Local Governments and Local Councils.

<sup>7</sup> James' model ranks different methods of election administration from expansive to restrictive and estimates their impact on turnout (James, 2010).



description in his study that matches the Korean system, increases the probability of somebody voting between 0.00 to 3 percentage points, a marker that can be tested using this study. (James, 2010) These factors should be considered when understanding early voting and its effect. Also, early voting in Korea benefits from the simplicity of holding only one kind of election at a time rather than holding general elections and an expansive election administration system relative to other countries, especially those such as the United States that require a voter to register themselves weeks before election day.

To begin with, an overall look at the percentage of registered voters who voted early shows that a significant number of people have already taken up the option to vote early. For both local election and National Assembly elections, the first two to use the system, just over one in ten voters chose to vote early. But the obvious standout as shown in Graph One<sup>8</sup> is the significant jump in early voting turnout for the presidential elections this year, with more than one in four voters casting a ballot early. The main explaining factor for this is that presidential elections usually have significantly higher overall turnout than National Assembly or local elections, usually somewhere around 15 to 20 points more on average, and therefore we can naturally expect early voting turnout in presidential elections to be higher. However, this increased use of early voting could also be due to the fact more voters are now aware of being able to vote during this period, or due to the fact that this year's presidential elections were held after the president was impeached due to large scale demonstrations and people were more enthusiastic to vote than ever before, or it could be because the election day itself was held on a Tuesday rather than the normal Wednesday.<sup>9</sup> We cannot be certain yet if this election was an outlier or part of a growing trend and with only one of each election to analyse as of yet. As more elections are held over the next few years, it will be useful to look at the more long-term trendline in voter turnout.

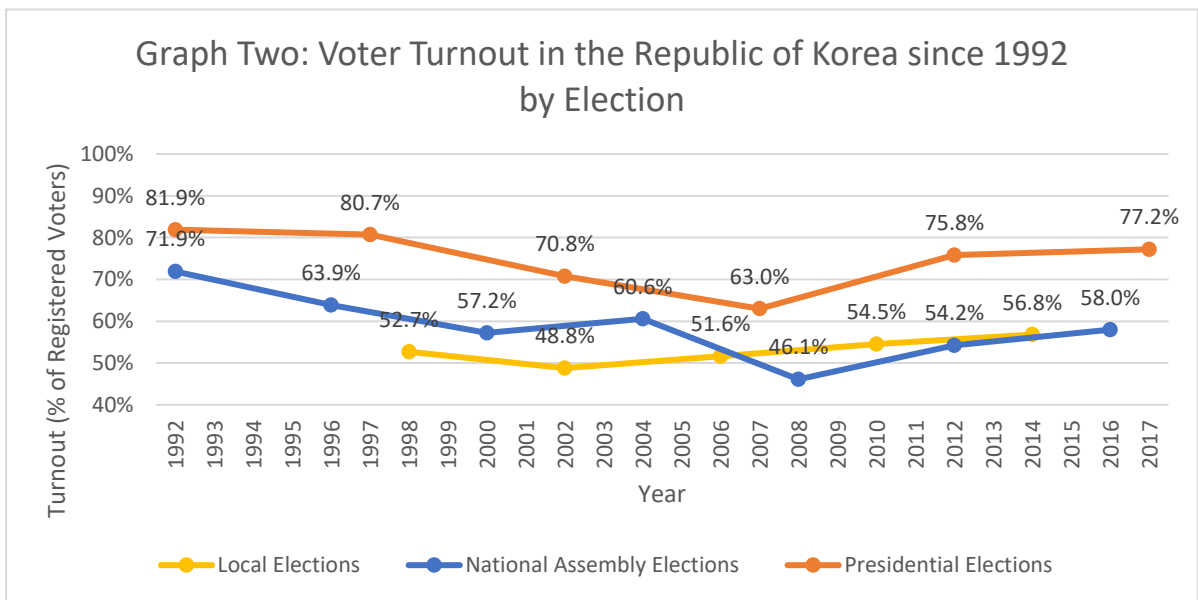


<sup>8</sup> All voting statistics come from the National Election Commission Election Data Archive (<http://info.nec.go.kr/>) and various post-election reports (중앙선거관리위원회 (National Election Commission), 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d)

<sup>9</sup> After impeachment, an election must be held within 60 days. As there was no appropriate Wednesday within those 60 days, it was instead held on the Tuesday exactly 60 days after the Constitutional Court reached its decision.

I believe the data regarding early voting's effectiveness suggest two important elements. Firstly, although it has had a limited effect on increasing voter turnout itself, it has contributed to continuing the rebound in youth turnout. Unlike many studies in the US and Canada, which show that older voters who are more likely to vote anyway use advance voting the most, it has been found that early voting in Korea has mainly benefitted people under. Secondly, this system has prevented many people who live different lifestyles compared to people's lives at the time when the election management system was designed from falling through the net and not voting. Korea has undergone significant demographic and social upheaval since the early 1990's, including a huge increase in the number of people living at a secondary residence, often alone, for extended periods. With postal voting not possible due to the lack of public trust, this system has offered a viable and popular alternative that has allowed the election administration system to adapt and fit the needs of modern Korea.

Firstly, the three elections held since the introduction of the new system have shown young voters are the most likely to take up the option to vote early. Consistently voters between the ages of 19 and 30 have made up one in four of all early ballots cast and in the presidential election this year a record 3 million people under the age of 29 cast their ballot early. This has contributed to a rebounding of election turnout as a whole which had already begun after 2010 since historic lows between 2002 and 2008. As shown in Graph Two, looking at the three types of elections since early voting was introduced, local elections experienced an uptick in turnout of 2.3%, National Assembly elections saw a 3.8% increase and finally the presidential election this year saw a moderate 1.4% increase when compared to 2012. Although these increases on the face of it are minor, the fact that young people have in particular found early voting more convenient raises hopes that this turnout will continue to grow in the future and those that have voted for the first time since 2014 because it was easier to do so will continue to cast a ballot in the future. In fact, when looking at National Assembly elections, voter turnout had dipped to as low as 24.2% in 2008 among 25 to 30-year olds according to a poll by the NEC, but in 2016 that number had doubled to 48.9%, a full 12 points up even on 2012's elections.<sup>10</sup>



However, one area that could still be improved is that there is still a gap between those that say they are going to vote and those that do actually turnout to vote, which has been constant throughout the last decade. For example in the last presidential election, just under 81% of the population told a Gallup poll that they will vote for certain during the election, but turnout was 77.2%. (Gallup Korea,

<sup>10</sup> The data is from the NEC's election data archives, but is well presented in (Open Lab Seoul, 2016)

2017). This suggests there are still people out there that want to vote and either are unable to or its too inconvenient, and the NEC should continue to look to close this gap through further innovation.

There is no evidence here to say early voting has been the sole reason for this increase, as turnout was beginning to show an upward trend again, but a look into these numbers further shows it is making voting easier for younger people in particular. This brings us on to the second and most important finding from early voting in Korea so far. I believe the reason it has been so popular among younger voters in Korea is because this system is favoured by people living in individual households or who live away from home for long periods, a phenomenon that has shot up in Korea over the past 20 years as the economy has matured. With people under 30 making up the majority of this kind of household, it is no surprise therefore that they have benefited most from this system.

The main indicator of this phenomenon is looking at the early voting turnout by province or city. In Korea, there are 17 Si (Metropolitan Cities) or Do (Provinces) and the NEC compiles extensive data on voting in each of these areas to ensure it can fully prepare election administration. What is interesting is that although early voting is most popular with the voters under the age of 30, two of the provinces that have consistently counted the highest percentage of early ballots have been Sejong Metropolitan City and South Jeolla province. However, Sejong has one of the lowest percentages people under 30 living there, yet South Jeolla has the highest of all (Statistics Korea, 2016). This shows there another factor coming into play here in terms of early voting. I argue that the biggest users of this system are those living in individual households or in secondary housing away from their registered address, and it is the huge rise in this kind of demographic that has made early voting such a popular and useful system that is providing a successful alternative for voters.

In Korea, Individual households became the most common form of households for the first time in 2015, bucking a family-centred cultural trend in South Korea that has lasted decades. Back in 1990, single-person households accounted for just 9% of all households combined, but 25 years later that number now stands at 27.2%, bringing South Korea in line with the USA at 28% and the UK at 28.5%. (Cho & Kim, 2016; Statistics Korea, 2016). In addition, Korea has a large number of public sector workers, with just over 2 million of the 26 million strong workforce currently in some form of public employment.<sup>11</sup> This is significant because in all areas of the civil service staff are rotated and must serve at least two years of their employment in rural areas, although many work in different locations for longer periods, often living apart from their families in housing dedicated for public officials and returning to their registered address at weekends.

In addition, in the late eighties and early nineties Korea experienced a phenomenon known as 'Goose Fathers.' During this period, up to 200,000 middle or upper-class families split, with the mother taking the children to countries such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand seeking high-quality education while fathers stayed in Korea to earn a wage, sending most of it out of the country for education. However in more recent times 'Sparrow Fathers' and 'Daechi-Dong Fathers,' where the dad sends his wife and children to live in parts of Seoul famous for a high-density of popular and well-funded schools, have replaced 'Goose Fathers' as Korea has become increasingly developed and the quality of education has risen to match those in the United States and Europe (Song, 2012). Adding to this, a study in the Demographic Research journal shows clear evidence that those from lower education backgrounds, especially men searching for employment between the ages of 25-34 and elderly women, are also likely to live alone. This again results in members of the family moving around on weekends and holidays or spending significant time in another residence. The report also noted "the economic

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<sup>11</sup> Civil servants include working soldiers. Data from the Korean Labor Institute and Statistics Korea but shown in English in (Heo, 2017; Trading Economics, 2017)

difficulties accompanying increasing youth unemployment and unstable jobs” is a significant cause in younger people living alone (Park & Choi, 2015).

All of this in turn has had a profound effect on election administration. When the Fifth Republic was established and direct and democratic presidential elections were restored back in 1988, there was simply very little requirement to cater for people living in individual households away from their registered address, and election officials were more focused on other elements of the election. However, the early voting system has proven a successful response to the changes in lifestyle in modern Korea, with families more spread out from their registered address and living at more than one address at the same time. In addition, even though voter registration in Korea is done automatically by the local government based on their residential registration list and therefore a person does not need to change their address on the voters list themselves, still there is an increasing chance that a voter may change their residence in the 60 days between the confirmation of the voters list and election day, meaning they would have previously had to return to their constituency to vote. Early voting also provides a solution to this problem.

The evidence can be seen when looking at the voting turnout statistics by region. These statistics show how many of the ballots *counted* in that region were from early voting, and used together with other demographic data it gives us a good sense of what drives early voting turnout and subsequently shows the system is useful and effective. The data presented here shows early votes as a percentage of all total ballots cast to try and remove the factor of the change of turnout overall between the three elections, but the raw early voting turnout is also available in the appendix. To note, early voting in a short period is now reaching the similar levels as postal voting in the UK, early voting in Canada, and in some regions is beginning to reach the level of advance voting (postal and early voting) in large US States such as California and Florida, which accounts for around half of all votes.<sup>12</sup> This supports the argument that this early voting system can be as effective as postal and other alternative forms of voting.

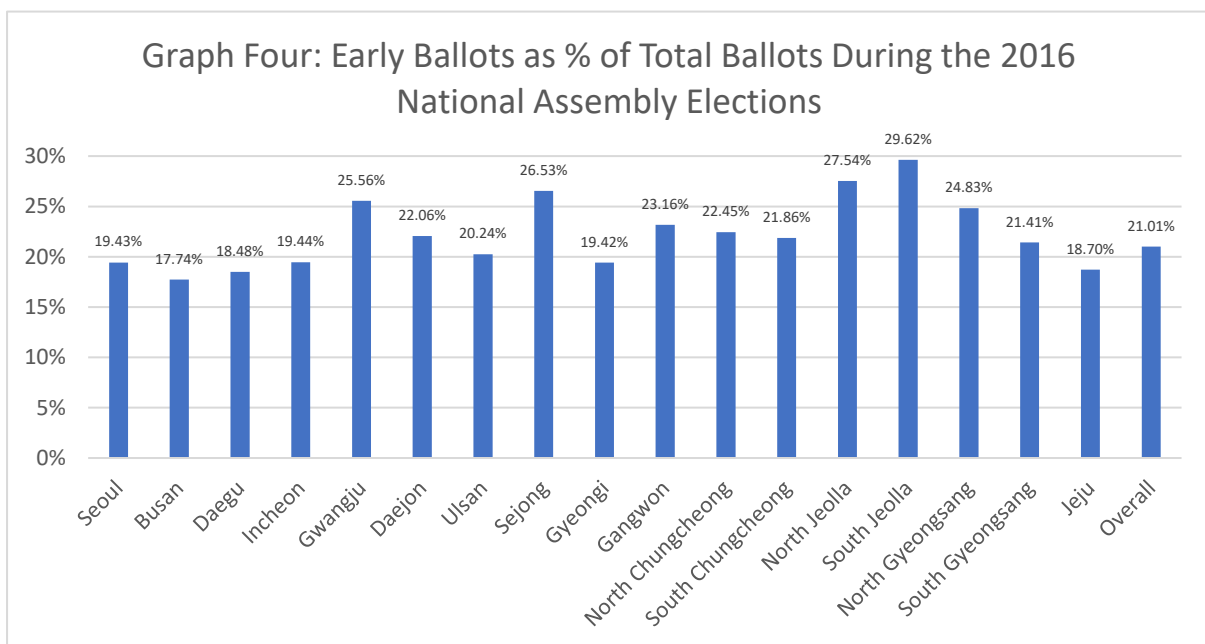
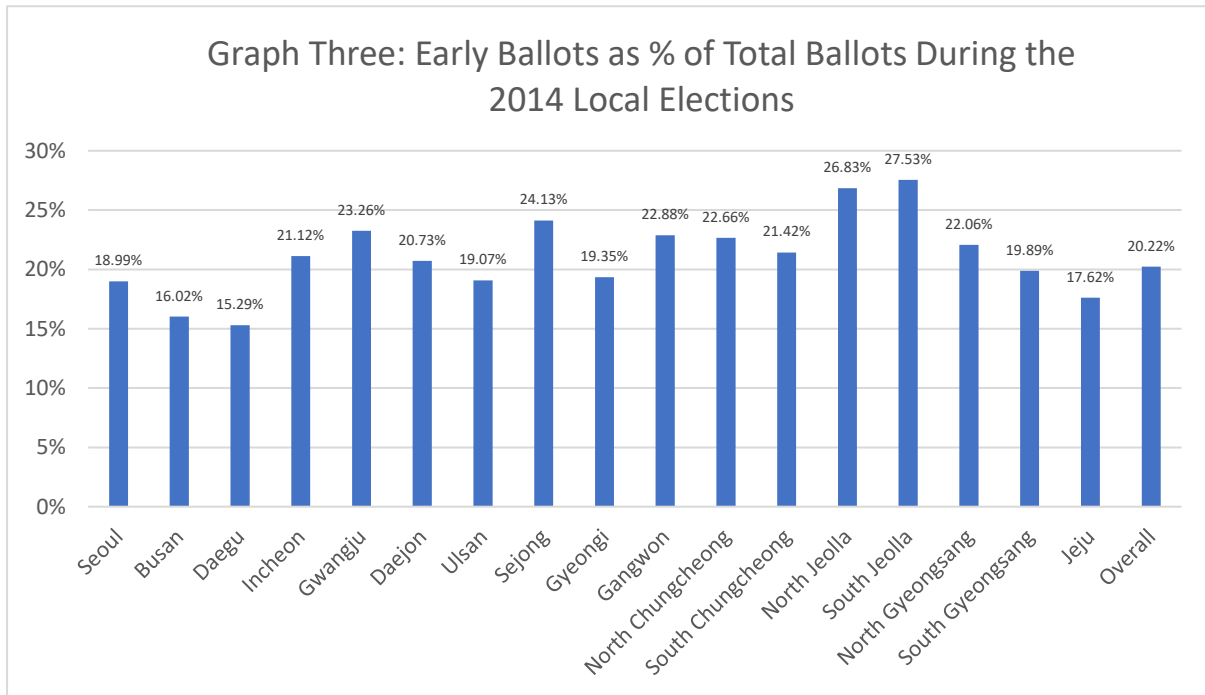
As we can see from Graphs Three, Four and Five, there has been a consistent pattern when looking at which areas of the country experience the highest proportion of early voting ballots. South and North Jeolla provinces in the southwest of the country, as well as Gwangju, a special metropolitan city within the borders of South Jeolla province and Sejong City, a new city built to be the de facto administrative capital of the country that houses all the major ministries and lies between North and South Chungcheon province. What links these regions is two-fold. Firstly, they have the largest proportion of civil servants in the workforce and most importantly they have the largest proportion of individual households when compared to the rest of the country. I believe that early voting is most important for these voters and is making voting either possible or at least far more convenient for people living between multiple addresses. Considering the system has only been in place for three years, for over 40% of voters in multiple regions to use early voting without any issues to date is a positive.

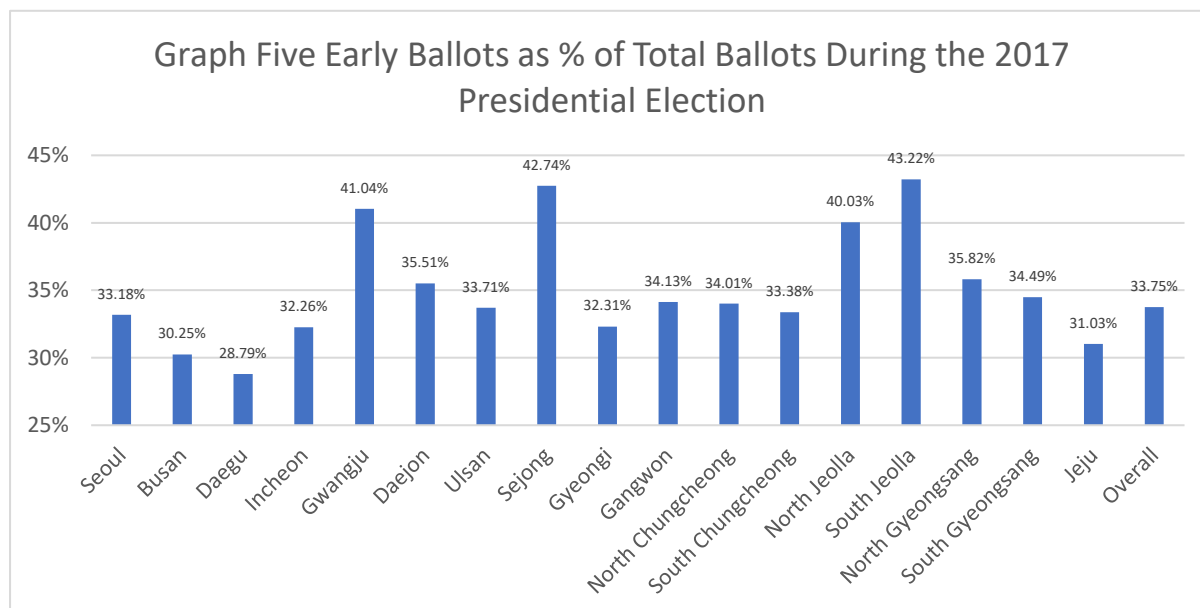
What this data shows is that this early voting system is proving a viable and strong alternative to postal voting. Faced with the changing demographics but the lack of political will to implement postal voting, Korea has developed what is effectively controlled postal voting, where the voter goes to a polling station and the election administrators post the ballot paper for the voter. The success has been managing to implement the system using an integrated voters list that has ensured automatic voter

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<sup>12</sup> UK postal voting was at 15.3% in 2015 General Elections (House of Commons Library, 2015), advanced voting in Canada hit 20.8% in the 2015 General Election (The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 2016). In the USA, California recorded 57.79% of advanced or mail voting in the 2016 (California Secretary of State, 2017) and over 71.3% in Florida (Florida Department of State, 2016).

registration has remained in place and no other barriers have been introduced to either registering to vote or casting a ballot. Even if voter turnout does not see a large increase in these elections over the next decade, I believe this system has already proven a success because it has brought the Korean electoral system in line with other modern electoral systems in providing a convenient alternative to voters who cannot be present on election day. I would argue this has been a defensive rather than an offensive tactic by election administrators in Korea in the way that it may not itself alone boost turnout, but it has proven able to prevent turnout falling as people’s lives become more fluid in modern times. This system is a good example for other young democracies that are looking into how to provide alternative forms of voting, especially if postal voting is not applicable.





### *Conclusion: A Viable and Effective Alternative to Postal Voting*

I believe that the early voting system has had a significant enough impact on the three elections it has been used in. It has enhanced voter convenience and has made voting significantly more accessible, especially for younger people and those who live away from their registered residence or their families, a demographic group that is continually growing and were at risk of falling out of the electoral system. Although other studies have noted how effective postal voting would be for this demographic and for increasing voter turnout in general, the unique political environment in South Korea means in it is not a viable option in the foreseeable future, and this early voting system is a good alternative to postal voting that responds to the changing needs of the public when voting. This is an example of how election management bodies and stakeholders can work to improve and mature a young election management system. It has contributed to a halt in the downward trend in voting turnout, and the evidence suggests that early voting will become increasingly popular and necessary if the number of individual households and those living on the move continues to rise.

I also believe that this early voting system would be a viable alternative for other countries who may have difficulties in administering a postal voting option for voters who cannot cast their ballot on election day, but there may be issues for countries with more rural polling stations or issues with reliable power supplies or networks. As with any case where technology is introduced to the election system on such a vast nationwide scale, ensuring that the power supply and network are stable, safe and include a back-up plan is essential to the credibility of the election as a whole. Administrative bodies should also consider if the cost of the introduction of this kind of system, which has not exactly been an inexpensive option even considering that equipment that was already in place has been used such as the ballot paper printers.

Also, when introducing systems like early voting it is absolutely crucial that they do not require any further barriers to registration or to voting itself. One of the most successful elements of the introduction of this system was the fact it did not change the way voters are automatically registered to vote in Korea and no prior and separate registration was introduced to go to a polling station early. I think this was one of the important reasons that the uptake of early voting has been so strong. I find agreement with other studies that argue the impact of the introduction of advanced voting like this is

relatively modest, but I do not think this means they should not be pursued. As long as these new forms of voting integrate to the current system, it makes voting more convenient and I believe further research will show long-term positive effects.

This analysis shows that this unique system developed as a result of the unsuitability of postal voting and the already existing election administration system is worthy of consideration and continued study. It is my hope that research into this system continues in the long run over a course of more elections and further study is undertaken on South Korean election administration as well as other countries that have successfully made the transition to a full democracy in more recent times. More research that focuses on these countries and other forms of alternative voting can lead to better and more diverse options available to younger election management bodies, which will lead to more credible elections. The early voting system analysed in this research is an example of how a relatively young democracy can adapt and deal with the challenges facing election management today, especially related to the increasing ease of movement and more fluid demographics, and further innovations will be required in the years ahead.

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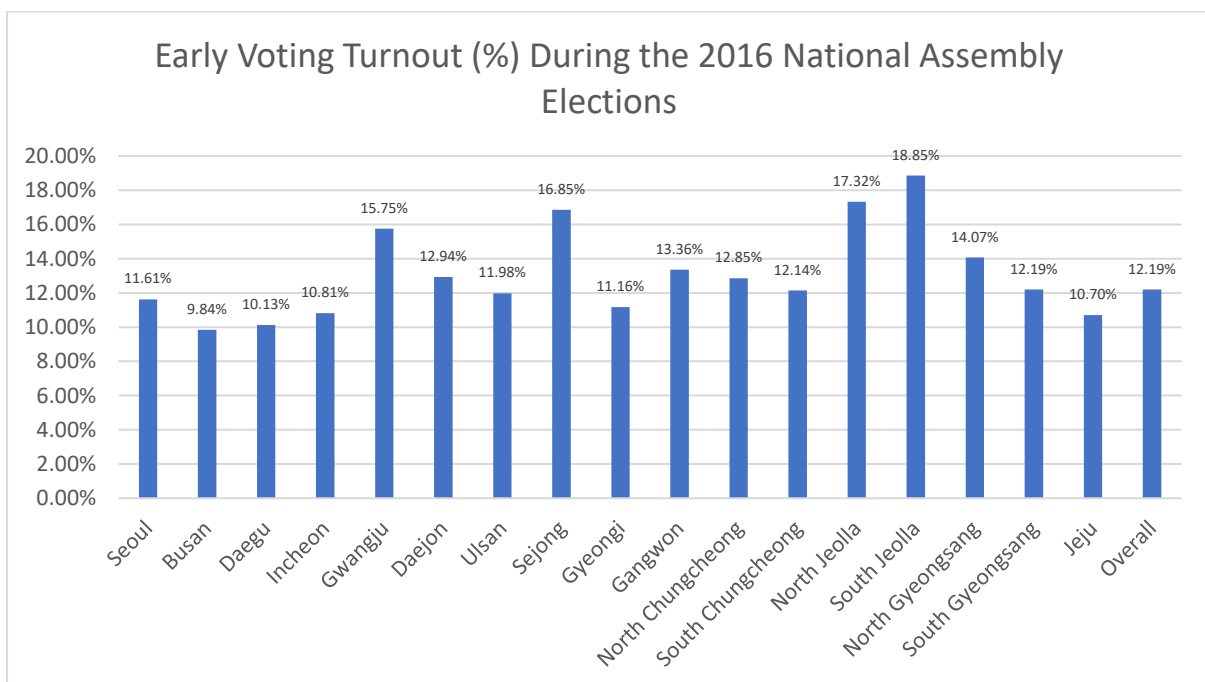
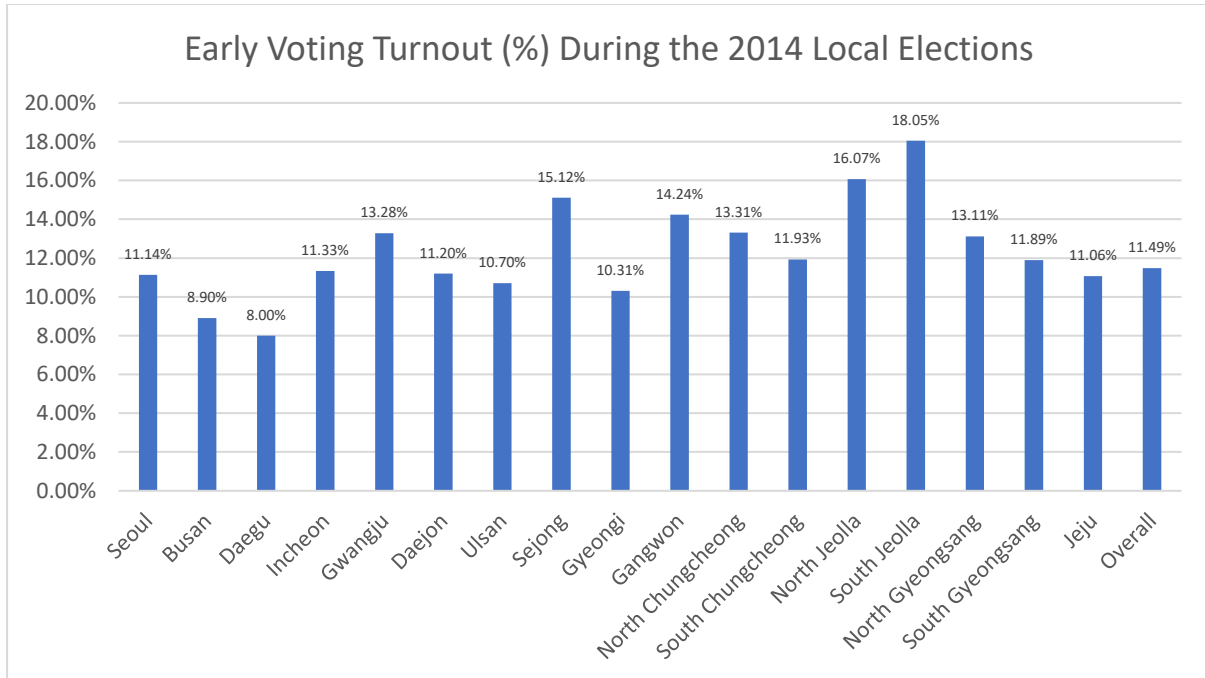
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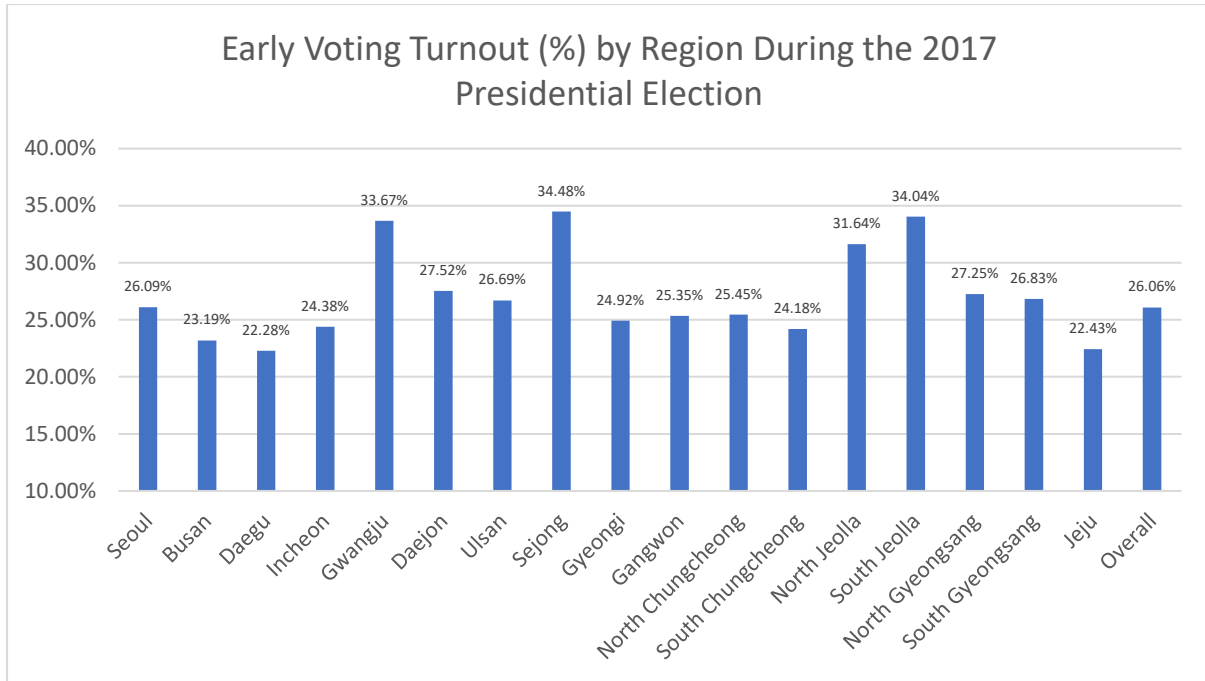
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## Appendix





Graph Six: Early Voting (%) During the 2017 Presidential Elections Turnout by Region, Age and Gender

Region	Region Type	Males by Age (Early Voting Only)										Females by Age (Early Voting Only)									
		19-29 M	30-39 M	40-49 M	50-59 M	60-69 M	70 - M	19-29 F	30-39 F	40-49 F	50-59 F	60-69 F	70 - F								
Seoul	Special City	280,809	238,367	217,236	216,131	150,064	84,685	230,372	209,054	178,705	179,976	123,789	77,780								
Busan	Special City	90,304	61,297	65,303	74,437	55,535	28,878	67,485	52,031	53,388	62,408	44,910	28,140								
Daegu	Special City	69,577	39,518	44,555	50,248	32,309	17,052	46,125	32,089	36,422	41,190	27,090	19,054								
Incheon	Special City	82,234	57,144	61,777	68,270	38,724	19,271	60,432	47,656	50,684	52,862	29,031	19,143								
Gwangju	Special City	51,242	34,778	41,709	41,905	24,977	15,427	40,290	30,350	36,577	36,564	22,108	16,969								
Daejeon	Special City	49,551	33,185	36,213	35,921	20,305	10,351	38,008	27,474	30,345	28,401	15,872	10,274								
Ulsan	Special City	40,120	23,597	25,144	31,973	15,304	5,582	27,537	18,809	23,034	23,718	10,997	5,345								
Sejong	Special City	7,075	8,546	8,746	5,983	2,995	1,592	6,616	8,110	6,748	4,666	2,594	1,636								
Gyeonggi	Province	355,435	258,949	285,558	286,221	154,519	84,062	261,164	217,556	233,362	217,886	121,189	81,901								
Gangwon	Province	50,360	27,429	33,266	36,855	21,608	13,956	36,034	21,124	25,837	28,177	17,312	14,276								
North Chungcheong	Province	48,277	29,172	33,424	38,287	22,182	14,225	36,283	22,738	26,467	28,402	17,253	15,019								
South Chungcheong	Province	59,901	40,441	43,794	45,042	26,390	18,247	46,414	30,187	32,893	32,098	20,547	18,069								
North Jeolla	Province	60,102	36,904	49,006	55,158	35,000	25,136	48,787	30,726	39,562	43,512	29,313	29,488								
South Jeolla	Province	60,776	38,546	53,098	64,034	41,130	31,982	51,027	31,411	40,818	47,756	33,515	41,228								
North Gyeongsang	Province	80,966	47,339	55,044	71,106	47,755	32,651	59,144	37,523	45,087	55,932	39,513	41,113								
South Gyeongsang	Province	101,143	65,536	74,963	84,469	50,687	28,154	74,434	52,685	62,453	66,238	40,434	35,148								
Jeju	Self-governing Province	17,427	10,879	13,880	12,681	6,439	3,438	13,852	9,753	10,549	8,858	4,838	3,592								
Total		1,505,299	1,051,627	1,142,716	1,218,721	745,923	434,689	1,144,004	879,276	932,931	958,644	600,305	458,175								