



THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS IN SOUTH KOREA AND UZBEKISTAN

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article compares the theoretical foundations and empirical development of political parties and party systems in South Korea and Uzbekistan, offering a contrasted view of two variant post-authoritarian trajectories. Drawing on classic theories by Duverger, Sartori, Lipset, and Rokkan, the paper emphasizes how historical legacies, electoral rules, and institutional constraints have shaped partisan dynamics in both countries. South Korea's democratic transition from military rule to consolidated democracy illustrates the evolution of a competitive, albeit regionally divided, party system characterized by electoral volatility and reform-driven changes. In contrast, state-controlled parties continue to dominate Uzbekistan's post-Soviet political development under a semi-authoritarian regime, where pluralism is merely formal rather than real.

JANUBIY KOREYA VA O'ZBEKISTONDA SIYOSIY PARTIYALAR VA PARTIYAVIY TIZIMLARNING NAZARIY ASOSLARI VA TARIXIY RIVOJLANISHI

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit so'zlar: Siyosiy partiyalar, partiya tizimlari, Janubiy Koreya, O'zbekiston, demokratlashuv, saylov tizimlari.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola Janubiy Koreya va O'zbekiston siyosiy partiyalari hamda partiya tizimlarining nazariy asoslari va empirik rivojlanishini solishtiradi va post-avtoritar taraqqiyotning ikki xil yo'nalishini taqqoslab ko'rsatadi. Duverger, Sartori, Lipset va Rokkan kabi siyosatshunos olimlarning klassik nazariyalariga tayangan holda, tarixiy meros, saylov qonun-qoidalari va institutsional cheklovlar ikki mamlakatda partiyaviy dinamikaning shakllanishiga qanday ta'sir qilgani muhokama qilinadi. Janubiy Koreyaning harbiy boshqaruvdan demokratiyaga o'tishi saylovlardagi beqarorlik va islohotlarga asoslangan o'zgarishlar bilan tavsiflangan, raqobatbardosh, biroq mintaqaviy jihatdan bo'lingan partiya tizimining rivojlanishini ko'rsatadi. Bunga qarama-qarshi ravishda, O'zbekistonda postsovet davridagi siyosiy taraqqiyot yarim-avtoritar tuzum ostida davom etmoqda va davlat tomonidan nazorat qilinadigan partiyalar ustunlik qilmoqda, bu yerda plyuralizm rasmiy maqom sifatida qaraladi, amalda esa partiyalar o'rtasida raqobat sezilarli darajada emas.

ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСНОВЫ И ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ РАЗВИТИЕ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ПАРТИЙ И ПАРТИЙНЫХ СИСТЕМ В ЮЖНОЙ КОРЕЕ И УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: Политические партии, партийные системы, Южная Корея, Узбекистан, демократизация, избирательные системы.

Аннотация: Данная статья сравнивает теоретические основы и эмпирическое развитие политических партий и партийных систем в Южной Корее и Узбекистане, демонстрируя два различных пути поставторитарного развития. Основываясь на классических теориях таких политологов, как Дюверже, Сартори, Липсет и Роккан, обсуждается, как историческое наследие, избирательные правила и институциональные ограничения повлияли на формирование партийной динамики в обеих странах. Переход Южной Кореи от военного правления к демократии

характеризуется избирательной нестабильностью и изменениями, основанными на реформах, что иллюстрирует развитие конкурентной, но регионально разделённой партийной системы. В противоположность этому, политическое развитие Узбекистана в постсоветский период продолжается в условиях полуавторитарного режима, где доминируют контролируемые государством партии, а плюрализм рассматривается лишь как формальность, тогда как реальная конкуренция между партиями остаётся минимальной.

Introduction

Fundamental to democratic governments, political parties serve as a vital conduit between the people and the government and carry out crucial governmental duties. They coordinate elections, express and unite interests, and help formulate and carry out policies. Scholars like Duverger (1954), Sartori (1976), and Lipset & Rokkan (1967) have emphasized the determining significance of party systems for democratic consolidation, political stability, and institutional development.

The article reviews the theoretical foundations of political parties and party systems with particular reference to their development in South Korea and Uzbekistan – two countries that emerged from authoritarian rule but followed different political paths. South Korea developed into a competitive democracy after decades of military rule, resulting in a dynamic party system with electoral volatility, regionalism, and regular institutional reform. In comparison, Uzbekistan, following its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, has had a managed and centralized political environment where formal party institutions exist but lack real competition or autonomy. Through the study of party classification theories, the role of parties in presidential systems, and the applicability of Duverger's law, this study explores the structural and institutional determinants of party formation in both countries. Through a comparative lens, this article contributes to the broader debates on democratization, electoral design, and the conditions under which political parties can be meaningful agents of representation, accountability, and democratic resilience.

Materials. This study is based on a qualitative comparative analysis of secondary sources, including academic literature, official reports, electoral data, and reports from international organizations. Key theoretical frameworks are taken from foundational works in political science, particularly Duverger (1954), Sartori (1976), and Lipset & Rokkan (1967) to provide a conceptual basis for party systems and electoral dynamics. Country-specific data was obtained from academic

journal articles, books, and policy reports on South Korea and Uzbekistan, with a focus on the post-authoritarian period.

Electoral data on performance, party formation, and institutional changes was collected from government databases, national election commissions, and election observation reports from organizations such as OSCE/ODIHR, Freedom House, and Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI). These resources offer details on the institutional, political, and legal structures that influence party participation and competition in each nation.

Formal constitutions, election laws, and party regulations, where applicable, are included in the research to ensure analytical depth and enable a more accurate examination of institutional factors. To find trends, differences, and parallels between the composition and growth of the party systems in the two countries, comparative political analysis techniques were used.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative comparative method to analyse the development and structure of political party systems in South Korea and Uzbekistan. The research design is most-different systems, selecting two countries with different institutions but similar in terms of post-transition state-building experiences.

Information was gathered from secondary sources, such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and legal documents (party statutes, electoral laws, and constitutions). Key theoretical and empirical works on party system typologies, electoral systems, and democratization were accessed through academic databases (e.g., JSTOR, Scopus). To measure party system features like the number of effective parties, electoral competition, ideological dispersion, and structural cleavages, theoretical frameworks were operationalized from Lipset & Rokkan's cleavage theory, Sartori's party system typology, and Duverger's law.

Theoretical Framework

Comparative party system analysis is based on classical political science theory that explains how social and institutional structures affect political competition. The Law of Duverger states that single-member district plurality (SMDP) electoral systems produce two-party systems, and proportional representation (PR) produces multiparty systems (Duverger, 1954). Cox refined this with the M+1 rule, which links district magnitude to the number of viable parties (Cox, 1997). But South Korea's mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system messes with these predictions. With 80% of the National Assembly members elected through SMDP and 20% through PR, the system creates dual incentives. Regional voting patterns, particularly the Yeongnam–Honam cleavage, have prevented two-party consolidation (Dalton and Chu, 2006). Electoral reforms and

proportional readjustments have alternatively promoted fragmentation and consolidation (Shin, 2018; Wang, 2014).

Sartori's (1976) typology helps us categorize systems by party number, size, and ideological dispersion, and distinguishes between moderate and polarized multiparty systems. South Korea is a moderate multiparty system, with two big blocs and a fluctuating third-party presence.

Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage theory explains party development in the context of long-term cleavages within society. While Korea's regional and ideological cleavages fit the classical models (e.g. center-periphery, church, state), class-based cleavages became political only after the 1997 crisis. Uzbekistan's nominal multiparty framework hides a system where formal institutions exist without real competition – an authoritarian adaptation of democratic form.

These theories guide the analysis that follows, which situates each country's party system in its institutional and socio-political context.

Historical Evolution of Party Systems

South Korea (Post-1987 Democratization). After the 1987 June Democracy Movement, South Korea transitioned from military authoritarianism to competitive democracy and a new constitution with direct presidential elections. Despite repeated party unifications, disintegrations, and rebranding, political competition has consistently been around two large groups: a liberal/progressive and a conservative bloc. Key moments were the peaceful transfer of power to civilian leaders Kim Young-sam (1992) and Kim Dae-jung (1997), which institutionalized electoral democracy (Dalton & Shin, 2006).

While parties remain unstable in structure, electoral moods demonstrate consistent trends. Regionalism has strongly conditioned votes. Yeongnam is aligned with conservatives, and Honam is a liberal base, shaped by historical events such as the 1980 Gwangju Uprising (Shin, 2018). Ideological cleavages (e.g., North Korea policy, neoliberal reforms) and the new generation, especially after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, also structured party alignments.

While South Korea's electoral system is a mixture of single-member districts and proportional representation that results in a nominal multiparty system, electoral outcomes settle into a two-bloc system. Studies indicate that the effective number of parties has remained constant at around two since the 2000s, partially aligns with Duverger's expectations while being flexible enough to include accommodating minor parties (Wang, 2014). Today, the Democratic Party of Korea and the conservative People Power Party control the legislature, with minor parties still having minimal influence.

Uzbekistan (Post-1991 Independence). On the other hand, Uzbekistan's post-Soviet history has produced quite a different party system. After proclaiming independence in 1991, President

Islam Karimov rebuilt the ex-Communist Party as the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDP), maintaining centralized power and keeping out genuine opposition (Melvin, 2000). The 1992 constitution proclaimed a commitment to democracy, but first-time elections were neither competitive nor free. Opposition parties faced some challenges, and only state-authorized parties operated by the mid-1990s.

The 1997 Law on Political Parties imposed draconian registration criteria, effectively forcing independent political actors out of business. Parties like UzLiDeP, Adolat, and Milliy Tiklanish were established under government supervision, often by decree, without distinct ideological platforms (Fumagalli, 2007).

After the leadership change in 2016, Uzbekistan's party system remained unchanged. The five registered parties are all pro-government, and legal opposition does not exist. International monitors such as the OSCE and Freedom House consistently observe that elections report that elections are improving better side with very little competition and transparency. (OSCE, 2019; Freedom House, 2023).

Unlike South Korea, where regionalism plays a big role in electoral outcomes and party alignment – especially the Yeongnam-Honam divide – Uzbekistan is different. Political parties in Uzbekistan are not organized around regional bases, nor do they have concentrated support from specific regions. They are structured around socio-professional groups and have nationwide appeal under a centralized political system. For example, UzLiDeP targets entrepreneurs, small business owners, and farmers; PDP targets pensioners and socially vulnerable groups; the Social Democratic Party "Adolat" targets professionals like teachers and healthcare workers; and the Ecological Party targets environmentally conscious citizens. These are functional, not territorial representation (The Korea Times, 2021).

Institutional and electoral structures.

Electoral System and Party Law in South Korea. The South Korean National Assembly employs a hybrid electoral system combining single-member districts with proportional representation. Recent reforms consecrated 253 representatives from SMDs through a plurality voting scheme, while 47 are chosen from PR lists; a segment of the seats is allocated through a compensatory method put in place in 2020 to enhance proportionality (Lee, 2021). Despite the SMD mechanism promoting centripetal pulls toward two-partyism, as theorized by Duverger's Law, the PR component fosters the entry of small parties as long as they achieve a candidate threshold between 3% and 5% of the total cast votes or hold a certain proportion of district seats (Wang, 2014). South Korea, therefore, has a comparatively multiparty system with two main ruling coalitions and occasional presence of smaller parties. Over time, the effective number of

parties (ENP) has been above 2; nonetheless, it has oscillated in the range of 2–3 with the advent of forthcoming polls (Kim, 2020).

South Korea's regulation of parties is generally permissive. The registration requirements are based on core organizational standards, with minimal ideological restrictions, except for anti-constitutional agendas. Public funding is available to parties that achieve a certain proportion of the vote, and private and online campaigning is even legally supported. Nonetheless, parties are often weakly institutionalized, with a tendency to revolve around charismatic personalities more than steady ideologies. Splits and rebranding are commonplace and serve to demonstrate the impermanence of party organization, but voter allegiances, most of all, regional and generation-based differences, are relatively stable (Dalton & Shin, 2006).

Electoral System and Party Law in Uzbekistan. The Oliy Majlis's Legislative Chamber consists of 150 deputies elected through a two-round system of voting in single-seat constituencies. Participation is only allowed for parties registered with the state, and the nominations of contestants are examined by the executive branch-supervised election committees (OSCE/ODIHR, 2021). Though *de jure* multiparty competition, highlighted by the Uzbekistan Liberal Democratic Party (UzLiDeP) and four registered parties, is represented, parties operate in a restricted, pro-government space. Voter turnout in the election is consistently reported as ranging from 70% to 90%; observers noted the absence of actual competition and administrative interference (Freedom House, 2021).

The legal order that currently exists dates back to the 1997 Political Parties Law and its amendments in 2019 and 2023, which prohibit the formation of parties based on religion, ethnicity, or territorial affiliation and impose stringent registration conditions (e.g., a requirement of at least 5,000 members from eight regions). Other restrictions include bans on foreign donations and stringent qualifications for candidates. While the gender ratio for party lists has been raised to 40% in certain reforms, the reforms performed do little more than serve the symbolic purpose.

Comparative Party System Characteristics

South Korea has a party system with moderate pluralism. Although two main blocs- liberal and conservative - drive the politics, small parties consistently get represented either through proportional seat allocation or through the winning of regional bases, with the effective number of parties (ENP) being between 2 and 3 (Dalton & Shin, 2006). Uzbekistan has a formally multiparty parliament with only five registered parties that take part in the elections. However, the parties show commitment only to the executive power, and hence, Freedom House (2021) has defined the party system as pluralistic in nature but monolithic in terms of commitment. Thus, while Uzbekistan has more parties, the actual presence of political pluralism is lacking.

Ideologically, South Korean parties reflect a set of real policy options. Conservatives generally support market opening, security alliances, and national defence, whereas progressives stress welfare, civil rights, and cooperation with North Korea. Generational and class cleavages – particularly after 1997 – also shape partisan alignments (Kim & Vogel, 2011). In Uzbekistan, party ideology is symbolic. While parties bear nominal designations like “social-democratic” or “ecological,” research finds their platforms vary little and seldom deviate from government policy (Freedom House, 2021; ICG, 2020). Political contestation is thus bereft of substantive ideological competition.

Party institutionalization also varies significantly. South Korean parties are weakly structured but embedded in electoral competition. Constant name changes, mergers, and realignments suggest a leader-oriented organization and unstable coalitional politics (Shin & Lee, 2021). Still, such mobility suggests an active electoral dynamic. In Uzbekistan, on the other hand, party stability is sustained. State-sponsored parties endure across elections but without grassroots organizations, independent leadership, or programmatic change. Party leadership is appointed and not internally democratic, as was noted by the OSCE (2019).

Election performance acts to reinforce these distinctions. Smaller parties can win seats in Korea using proportional rules, while two large blocs dominate district contests. For instance, in the 2020 National Assembly election, smaller parties like the Justice Party gained seats using the PR tier. In Uzbekistan, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (UzLiDeP) gains the greatest number (e.g., 64 of 150 seats in 2024), with others and regime party-aligned independents dividing the rest. However, electoral competitiveness is compromised by the absence of alternation or effective opposition (OSCE, 2024).

Finally, regional cleavages strongly shape South Korean voting patterns, with Yeongnam (conservative)-Honam (liberal) historical cleavages (Kim, 2007). On the other hand, party competition in Uzbekistan is not differentiated by region. Political parties are nationalized and under the control; regional differences, to the degree that they exist, appear more by way of turnout or backing for individual candidates rather than for party names. This is corroborated by legal restrictions against religious or ethnic-based parties (Election Law, 1997), resulting in a depoliticized space in terms of cleavages.

Findings

When South Korea and Uzbekistan are compared cross-country, it becomes clear that their party systems have developed along distinct paths depending on the type of regime, the electoral system, and historical legacies. The gradual institutionalization of competitive party politics was made possible by South Korea's democratization after the 1987 transition. Despite inadequate

internal party structure and periodic realignments, the system evolved into a moderate multiparty setup with two dominant blocs (liberal and conservative) and with an associated set of small, issue-based parties. Electoral reforms in the form of a mixed-member system have encouraged pluralism as regional cleavages (e.g., Yeongnam-Honam) still structure voter alignments.

In contrast, post-independence political institutions in Uzbekistan have produced a managed multiparty system where official institutions exist in a state of non-competition. Parties are state-sanctioned, ideologically undifferentiated, and exist primarily as formal entities. Electoral legislation, party registration procedures, and constitutional provisions are ostensibly designed to confine opposition and enjoin executive dominance. Although Uzbekistan has made some reforms (e.g., gender quotas and procedural reform), the absence of competitive elections and ideological diversity is obvious.

On five dimensions – number of parties, ideological diversity, institutionalization, electoral performance, and regional divisions – South Korea demonstrates competitive pluralism, and Uzbekistan displays centralized rule with formal multipartyism.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes how crucial regime context, path dependencies, and institutional development are in forming political party systems. The example of South Korea shows how a post-authoritarian society can create a competitive and functional party system despite ongoing structural issues like regional polarization and weak party institutionalization, provided that elections are open and civil society is involved. Korea's experience affirms classical theories such as Duverger's law and Sartori's typologies, while showing that mixed systems can accommodate meaningful pluralism.

Uzbekistan, however, is a form of adaptation in which multiparty institutions serve mainly to institutionalize centralized domination. Having multiple parties does not mean choice at the polls, ideological diversity, or contestation over policy.

The comparative outcome shows that democratization in itself is no guarantee for the implementation of competitive party systems. Rather, the interconnection between electoral systems, law in general, and societal cleavages is decisive in determining the parties' position as representation tools or regime maintenance instruments.

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