

Abstract

Essays on Strong Presidencies and the Politics Behind the Ballot:
Evidence from South Korea

by

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This dissertation project seeks to understand the political dynamics of ruling parties under strong presidencies at the legislative recruitment stage with a regional focus on South Korea. The first paper introduces my main argument regarding how strong presidencies can determine the form and function of ruling party reforms such as legislative primaries. I argue that under strong presidential systems, wherein the executive abides by formal rules but is still willing to push her de facto power to its constitutional limits, ruling party elites - especially those who do not belong to the president's faction - can counteract presidential discretion by voluntarily democratizing the candidate selection process. I provide empirical evidence of these dynamics from South Korea during 2008-2016. The second paper formalizes the conditions under which ruling party elites endogenously choose to implement legislative primaries as a means to prevent the president from interfering in the party nomination process and provides implications of ruling party reforms on voter welfare. Whereas the first two papers study the contexts under which competing factions within the ruling party are able to agree upon the party's nomination processes and outcomes, the third paper examines a case of a failed coordination. The paper draws upon empirical evidence from the 2008 South Korea Legislative Election, where some party elites chose to defect from the ruling party and successfully formed a transitory electoral alliance.

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