

FH's PERSPECTIVE

2020 South Korea General Election Results

On April 15, 2020, South Korea's 21st General Election for the 300 National Assembly seats ended with the Democratic Party of Korea's landslide victory. President Moon Jae-in's ruling party has secured a total 180 seats accordingly - the biggest majority since the country's transition to democracy in 1987 and the General Election of 1988. The record high turnout of 66.2 percent in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic has set another milestone in South Korea's modern political history.

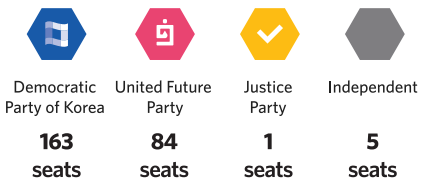
What were the driving forces behind the historical result?

FleishmanHillard Korea has taken a closer look at the election outlook, diving deep into the public sentiment and identifying the lessons to be shared regarding the issues of communication.

21st General Election

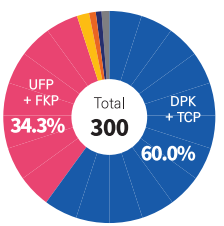
Source: National Election Commission

Directly elected seats



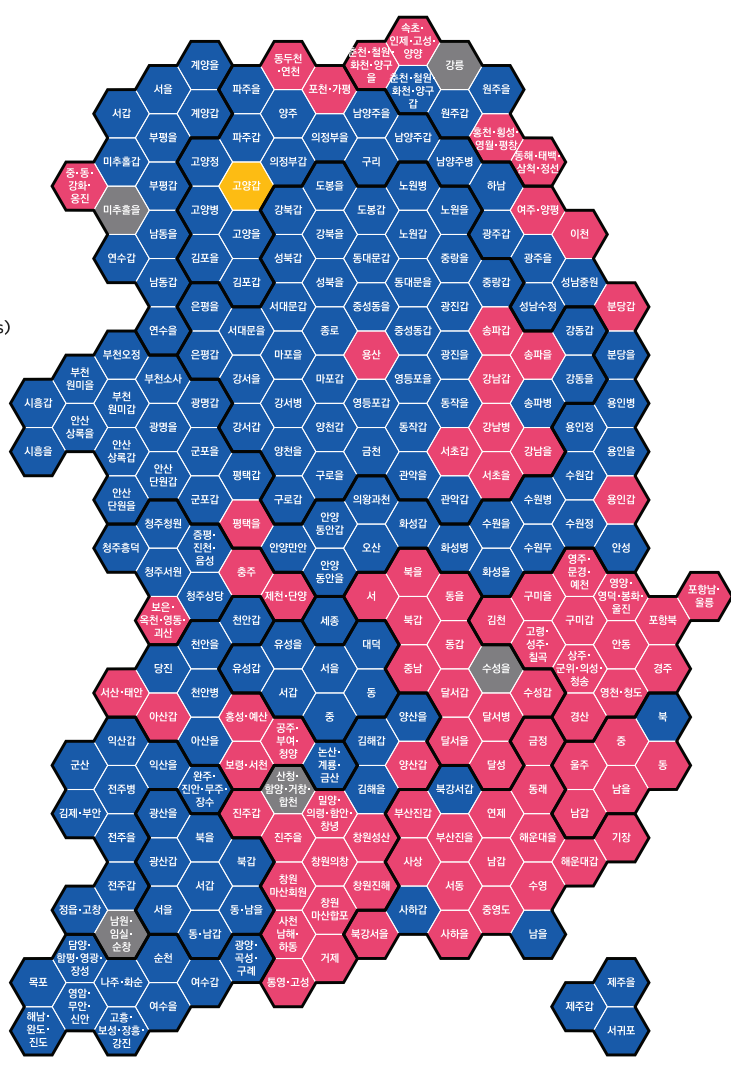
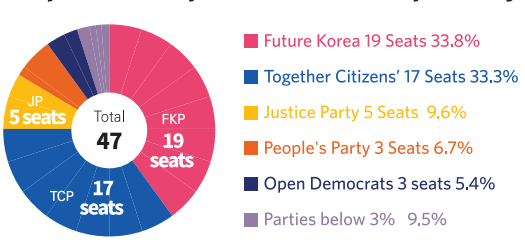
Seats per party

Total 300 seats
(253 directly elected seats + 47 proportional representation (PR) seats)

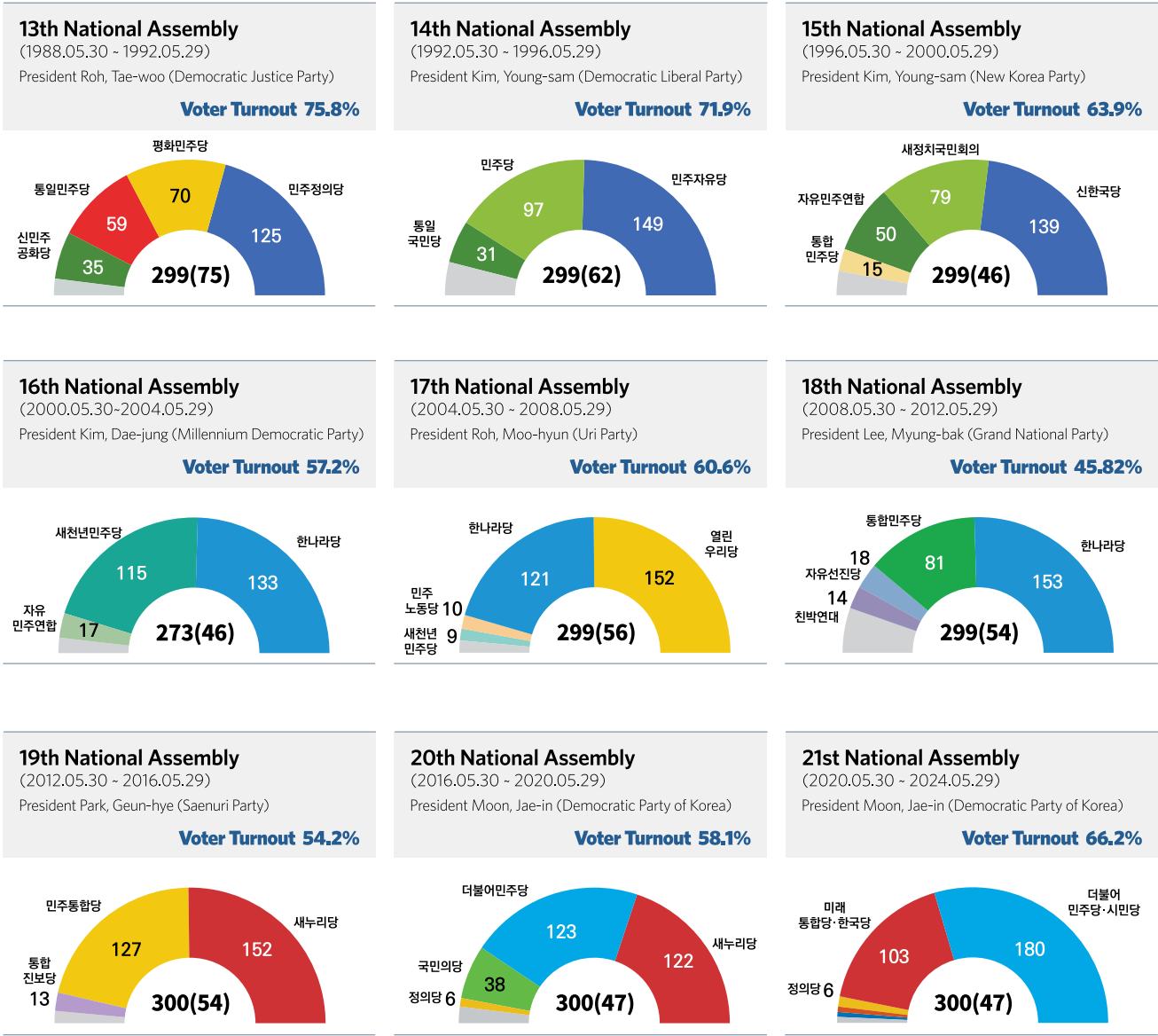


Democratic Party of Korea + Together Citizens' Party	180	60.0%
United Future Party + Future Korea Party	103	34.3%
Justice Party	6	2.0%
People's Party	3	1.0%
Open Democrats	3	1.0%
Independent	5	1.7%

Proportional Representation Seats per Party

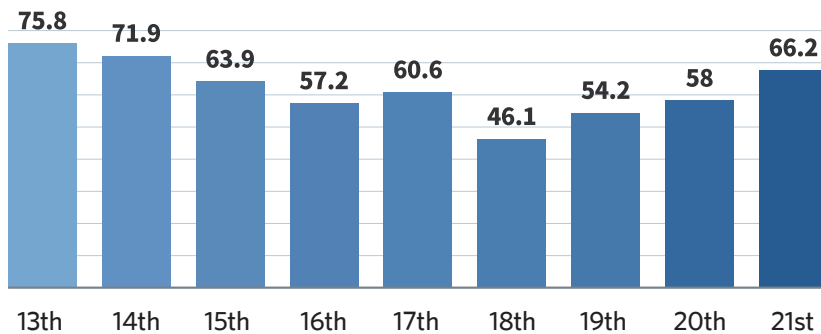


Number of Seats in National Assembly from 13th (1988) to 21st (2020)



Source: National Election Commission

General Election Voter Turnout (in %)



Source: National Election Commission



Photo credit: KBS NEWS

I. Understanding Public Sentiment through the Election Outcome

1. Unite to overcome the national crisis

The 20th National Assembly is often remembered for its frequent political confrontations. In the election result this time, we saw a consensus that such political division only adds challenges against overcoming the COVID-19 crisis.

South Koreans are known to have shown a strong sense of unity in times of crisis. As South Koreans demonstrated the deep patriotism to jointly overcome the 1997 financial crisis with the 'gold collection campaign,' the same message holds with the 21st General Assembly – We need to unite to overcome the national crisis.

2. Rationale behind proportional representation voting

South Korea saw an all-time high record of 35 political parties putting forward candidates in the 21st General Election, indicating that the public needs have become increasingly multidimensional and diversified. But, at the voting booths, many voters seemed to have looked away from this and instead focused on preventing unwanted candidates from winning the seats. The 21st General Election has clearly demonstrated the trend of 'fragmentation in unity' is on the rise. The left-right divide was seen extensively in the TK (acronym of Daegu and Gyeongsangbuk-do province) and PK (acronym of Busan and Gyeongsangnam-do province) regions, where the 'Us vs. Them' sentiment showed its revived strength.

3. Economy over politics

With the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic felt in every corner of the country, South Korean citizens are showing high levels of concern over their livelihoods and mental health. South Korea's heavy reliance on foreign trade amplifies its vulnerability to external shocks. The prolonged border closures and social distancing measures are heightening people's concerns over the economy and the weakness of lower-income families. Such economic challenges intensifies South Koreans' awareness that this is no time for a political fight.



A public health officer is checking the polling place for self-quarantined voters in Jongno-gu, Seoul (photo credit: Yonhap News Agency)

II. Communication Insights from the Election

1. What really matters to the people (most importantly, to decision-makers and influencers)?

In this election, the score card for the government and the ruling party weighed less than the problems tied to the opposition party itself. Despite the mistakes and failures, the government has redeemed itself with a commitment to making changes. On the other hand, the opposition bloc has been preoccupied with raising objections and offering judgements against the ruling power. They have neither reformed itself nor was ever willing to do so. Although the Moon administration is in its midterm, the election's paradigm was not geared towards a 'midterm evaluation.' Instead, for many voters, it was more of a 'judgement day' for the opposition party. The opposition party failed to comprehend this prevailing public sentiment and the spirit of the times (zeitgeist). This case reminds businesses that it is critical to make timely understanding and quickly respond to the needs of customers and key influencers at any time and particularly in the time of crisis.

2. The political uncertainties are likely to linger on.

Will the political situation in Korea stabilize quickly? The chances are 50-50. And, businesses should prepare for continuing instability. The public expects the colossal ruling party to lead collaborative governance, and the opposition party to respect the majority's rule. Realistically speaking, however, both parties are unlikely to follow these desired courses of actions. Wielding more seats and stronger power, the ruling party is more likely to move to tackle its reform agenda, while the opposition is to resist that, focusing on upholding its political relevance and visibility. In addition, political realignment that naturally follows an election will add further instability. Many challenges remain, including the presidential election in two years and the merge between the opposition United Future Party and other minor parties. Further, the semi-proportional representation system is also facing an existential challenge, as it has clearly exposed its limitations through this election.

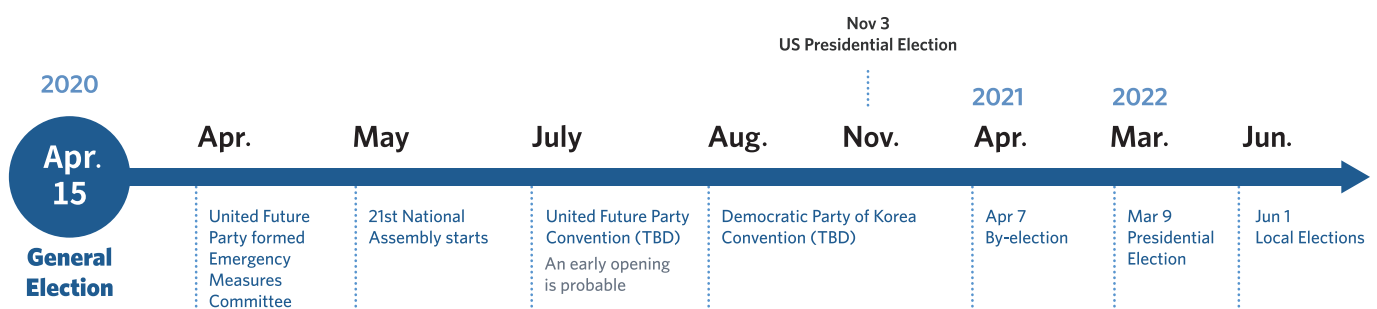
3. We live in an increasingly fragmented society.

Most candidates from minor parties did not get elected. Only the ruling party and the main opposition party have more than 20 members elected and thus are qualified to form entities to be represented in inhouse negotiations within the legislature. But, this does not mean that Korean political landscape has gone back to the two-party system it used to be. The emergence of 35 political parties during the campaign reflects the rise of diverse stakeholders with varying needs in the political arena. Hastily established prior to the election, many of these small political parties experienced political fights amongst its members and had difficulty delivering cohesive 'One Voices' to their audience. From this, businesses should see the possibility of similar rise of diversified, divided and fragmented stakeholders in their fields of operation. Foreseeing potential stakeholders ahead of the curve may matter more than focusing just on dealing with existing stakeholders.

4. Sense and sensitivity

In a competitive environment in which individuals and organizations must fight for their own survival, businesses must remain vigilant about even the smallest potential threats and take preemptive measures before a situation escalates into a crisis. CEOs and top executives should articulate the organization's position in their communications with the National Assembly and at public hearings and government-industry meetings. They should also be ready to argue persuasively, make necessary compromises and actively seek solutions for their concerns, while cooperating with the government in the path to economic recovery. However, to avoid inflicting potential damage to the organizational reputation during these processes, it is crucial to secure the support of consumers and business partners through transparent communication with internal/external stakeholders and responsible follow-through actions. Heightening a sense of alertness about the external environment and developing sensitivity to the zeitgeist are essential points to keep in mind for companies in navigating the complexities of today's business landscape.

III. Future Timeline



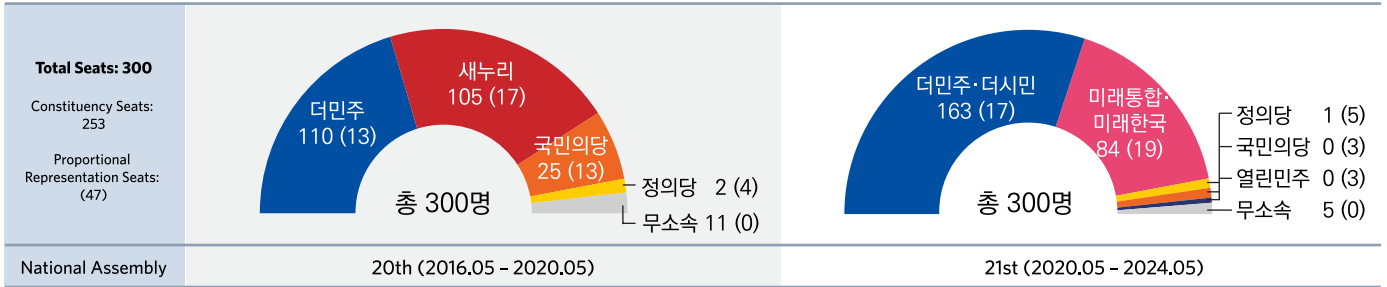
20th - 21st General Election Results

Source: National Election Commission

	20th	21st
National Assembly	20th (2016.05 - 2020.05)	21st (2020.05 - 2024.05)
President	Park, Geun-hye (18th, 2013.02-2017.03) → Moon, Jae-in (19th, 2017.05-)	Moon, Jae-in (19th, 2017.05-2022.05)
Ruling Party	Saenuri Party (Conservative) → Democratic Party of Korea (Liberal)	Democratic Party of Korea (Liberal)



National Assembly Seats by Party



Voter Turnout

Overall Turnout	58%	66.2%
Early Voting Rate	12.2%	26.69%

Voter Distribution by Age	20th (2016.05 - 2020.05)		21st (2020.05 - 2024.05)	
	Population Ratio	Turnout Rate	Population Ratio	Turnout Rate
19 / 18-19	1.6%	53.6%	Not Available	
20	15.9%	52.7%		
30	18.1%	50.5%		
40	21.0%	54.3%		
50	19.9%	60.8%		
60	12.4%	71.7%		
70	7.6%	73.3%		
80 +	3.5%	48.3%		

National Assembly Member Distribution by Terms

First Term	44.0%	50.7%
More than Two Terms	56.0%	49.3%

National Assembly Member Distribution by Age

20-30	0.9%	4.3%
40	16.7%	12.7%
50	53.7%	59.0%
60	27.0%	23.0%
70 +	1.7%	1.0%

National Assembly Member Distribution by Gender

% of Female Members	17.0%	19.0%
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First-term representatives to look out for in the 21st General Election

At every National Assembly in the past, those first-term representatives with expertise in their own respective fields have stood out in legislative process. Amid the growing needs to revive the coronavirus-hit economy and secure future growth engine, their knowledge and experiences in business, science and technology will play important roles this time.

IT, Science and Technology



**Kim,
Young-sik** (60)

Gumi-Si B district, Gyeongbuk
United Future Party

- Chairman at Korea Institute of Start-Up and Entrepreneurship Development
- Professor and President at Kumoh National Institute of Technology



**Yang,
Hyang-ja** (53)

Seo B district, Gwangju
Democratic Party of Korea

- Executive at Samsung Electronics
- President of National Human Resources Development Institute



**Lee,
Young** (50)

Proportional Representative (13)
Future Korea Party

- Chairman of the Korea Venture Business Women's Association
- Director of Korea Copyright Protection Agency



**Hong,
Jung-min** (41)

Goyang-Si C District, Gyeonggi
Democratic Party of Korea

- Chief Researcher at Samsung Economic Research Institute
- Chief Attorney at Law Story

Macroeconomics and Public Finance



**Yoo,
Gyeong-joon** (58)

Gangnam C District, Seoul City
United Future Party

- Economist at KDI
- Commissioner of Statistics Korea



**Yoon,
Hee-suk** (50)

Seocho A District, Seoul City
United Future Party

- Professor at KDI School of Public Policy and Management
- Research Director at KDI Fiscal Welfare Policy Division



**Cho,
Jeong-hoon** (47)

Proportional Representative (6)
Democratic Party of Korea

- World Bank Country Manager for Uzbekistan
- Deputy Director of Future Consensus Institute

Energy and Environment



**Yang,
Won-young** (48)

Proportional Representation (9)
Together Citizens' Party

- Commissioner of Energy Department at Korean Federation for Environmental Movements
- Secretary General of Energy Transition Korea

Finance and Corporate Governance



**Yun,
Chang-hyun** (59)

Proportional Representation (2)
United Future Party

- President of Korea Institute of Finance
- Professor of Finance at the Business Administration Division in the University of Seoul



**Lee,
Yong-woo** (56)

Goyang-Si D district, Gyeonggi
Democratic Party of Korea

- Executive Director at Korea Investment Management Co., Ltd.
- Co-Chief Executive Officer at Kakao Bank



**Hong,
Sung-guk** (57)

Seojong-Si A District
Democratic Party of Korea

- President of Mirae Asset Daewoo Securities
- President of KDB Daewoo Securities

Labor Relations



**Kim,
Joo-young** (58)

Gimpo-Si A District, Gyeonggi
Democratic Party of Korea

- Head of Federation of Koran Trade Unions