

Completion Report

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Subject of Research Project: The increase in the number of non-vote elections in the Town council elections and the reform of the town council

Uncontested elections due to lack of candidates are rapidly increasing in town and village assembly elections. The massive occurrence of an uncontested election leads to the collapse of the parliamentary system and undermines the foundation of representative democracy. As a result, parliamentary reforms aiming to address the shortage of election candidates, which can accomplish competitive elections are increasing. In this study, four regions are selected and field surveys are conducted to find out the specific contents and achievements of parliamentary reform. In recent local elections in Korea, there have been many uncontested elections. Through this survey, I also attempt to obtain implications for resolving the shortage of election candidates for local councils in Korea.

Hokkaido Urahoro Town Council tried two projects, *Village Café Assembly* and *Assembly Visit to the Village*, to raise interest towards the local assembly and, as a result, the members' remuneration was also significantly increased. Iizuna Town Council in Nagano Prefecture operated *the Assembly Newsletter Monitoring System* and *Policy Supporter System* to keep residents interested in parliamentary activities and policies. The remuneration of the members was greatly increased and the newly introduced political activity cost system allowed to pay 10,000 yen per month to the council members. Okawa village in Kochi Prefecture once tried to abolish the assembly and set up a *village assembly*, which is a system of direct democracy. The decision was made from the discussion to continue the assembly, and the assembly significantly lower the prohibition of concurrent employment condition to lift a burden for residents to run for office. The Takagi Village Assembly in Nagano Prefecture implemented reforms to hold assembly meetings on holidays and at night to promote the candidacy of salaried employees and women who are in the process of raising children. This has also led to an increase in the number of residents attending parliamentary meetings.

As described above, the reform of a town and a village assembly mainly aims to induce interest towards the assembly and to create an environment conducive to potential candidates. This is in line with the results of existing empirical studies, which reveal that it is important to proactively find new candidates and raise the salaries of members of parliament in order to resolve the shortage of candidates.

As a result of these reforms, all four towns and villages had candidates that exceeded their quota in the following elections. However, these towns and villages are all very small municipalities, and their populations are declining and aging. In order for these achievements to continue, new reforms should be promoted to enhance the sense of community and discover female and young politicians in addition to the existing reforms.

The results obtained from the field investigation and the implications for the Korean local council were shared with related researchers through the presentation at the study group. Furthermore, the reform of the Urahoro Council, which was the most faithfully investigated and obtained a lot of related data, was written as a research paper and published in an academic journal, *The Korea Journal of Political Science* (Vol.31, No.2, May 2023).