

KWDI Issue Paper

Research Title: A Study on How to Improve the Operation of Gender-Targeted Public Funding for Political Parties in South Korea

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Abstract

- ◆ The Public Funding for Women Candidates, and the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, which are national subsidies for political parties to foster women politicians, were established to enhance women's political participation. However, about 20 years after their implementation, there have been doubts about their effectiveness.
- ◆ This study confirmed that the provisions for these funds under the Political Funds Act are ambiguous and that the actual management of these funds has encountered practical difficulties, ultimately failing to achieve their intended legislative purposes.
- ◆ Therefore, this study proposed policy improvements to make the relevant systems and operation more practical. Specifically, it suggested expanding the scope of Public Funding for Women Candidates — currently limited to parliament members — to include local government leaders. Also, the study recommended considering subsidies for those who are elected in addition to the subsidies for nomination of candidates. Given the scale of Public Funding for Women's Political Development, this study advocated for the appointment of a dedicated workforce and the mandatory disclosure of audit reports for all national subsidies provided to political parties.

Background and Issues

- The Public Funding for Women Candidates, introduced in 2002 under the Political Fund Act, aims to increase women's participation in politics. It provides subsidies to women candidates through political parties, proportional to the percentage of women nominated in a given electoral district. The Public Funding for Women's Political Development, established in 2004, allocates 10% of the ordinary subsidies among the total national subsidies provided to political parties for promoting women in politics.
- However, about 20 years after their implementation, the effectiveness of these initiatives is being questioned (Kwon et al., 2017). The debate has primarily focused on the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, with the main concern being that the fund has not achieved its intended purposes.
- Criticisms have arisen that instead of supporting women politicians, the funds have been used for the personnel expenses of party officials and organizational operations. Also, the Political Funds Act is criticized for its vagueness regarding permitted uses of the funds and for its restrictions on items of expenses, making the law unreflective of practical realities.
- The Public Funding for Women Candidates is allocated according to the number of parliamentary seats a political party holds, following the national subsidy guidelines for political parties. This system adversely impacts extraparlimentary and minor parties which, despite nominating women candidates, often receive reduced or no subsidies in comparison to major parties. Additionally, the Public Funding for Women's Political Development lacks concrete guidelines on its usage within the provision that it is intended to be used for the political advancement of women.
- Given that political parties are constitutional entities funded by national subsidies, they must enhance transparency and accountability of their budget usage. It is crucial that they also develop strategies to identify and nurture women politicians as a means to promote gender equality.
- Although many women are active in political parties, few run for election due to the challenges they face at the local level. Political parties often neglect to identify and nurture women politicians within their parties, preferring instead to nominate women with established public profiles from outside the party. Since the establishment of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development in 2004, political parties have failed to create a consistent framework for the education and training of women politicians. This lack of infrastructure contributes to the scarcity of party-affiliated women candidates during elections.

● Basic Concepts of the Public Campaign Financing System and the Political Funds Act

- ▶ The Public Campaign Financing System is "a scheme in which, in order to prevent the negative effects of non-interference on election campaigns, the state manages and funds the elections, and thereby ensures balanced elections, reduces election costs, and promotes electoral fairness". The system was introduced in earnest after the enactment of the Act on Public Official Election and Election Malpractice Prevention in 1994 (currently the Public Official Election Act) (Lee, 2016: 1).
- ▶ The Political Funds Act was enacted to "guarantee the fair provision of political funds, ensuring the transparency of political funds through the disclosure of the details of their revenues and expenditures and prevent irregularities involving political funds" (Article 1). The basic principles for revenues and expenditures of political funds are in line with the Political Funds Act.
- ▶ National subsidies help to protect the activities of political parties, promote the development of policy-oriented parties, ensure fair competition among them, and advance democracy within political parties (Lee, 2009: 127; Chung, 2021: 47-48).
- ▶ Meanwhile, there is a lack of practical mechanism for auditing the use of national subsidies (Chung, 2021: 57-58; Kim et al., 2015: 50; Cho, 2015: 19-20).

● Gender Inequality in Political Participation and Gender Differences in Political Fundraising

- ▶ In politics, men have predominantly held power, whereas women are located in the periphery. The gender quota system, an affirmative action measure, aims to ensure that a specified proportion of legislative seats are filled by women in order to address women's political under-representation (Cho & Kim, 2010: 110).
- ▶ Among the factors contributing to women's political under-representation, 'funding' plays a crucial role (OSCE & ODIHR, 2014: 76; Kim et al., 2013; Moon et al., 2018: 95-96; Kwon, 2019: 98). The financial resources of candidates significantly impact election outcomes (Kim, Kim, & Jung, 2013; re-cited from Kim, Cho, & Yoon, 2020: 116-117), and women often face greater challenges than men in mobilizing assets and raising political funds (Lee et al., 2020: 213).
- ▶ A study by Jeon and Nam (2020) established a positive correlation between election expenditures and polling rates, suggesting that gender disparities in the mobilization of political funds can consequently lead to gender differences in political participation.

● Current Status and Reality of National Subsidies for Women Politicians

● Dependence and Scale of National Subsidies for Domestic Political Parties

- ▶ South Korea's Political Funds Act specifies national subsidies for women under Article 26, which addresses the Public Funding for Women Candidates, and Article 28(2), which addresses the Public Funding for Women's Political Development. The Political Funds Act categorizes the Public Funding for Women Candidates as the first type of political fund, and the Public Funding for Women's Political Development as the third type.
- ▶ Given the proportion of national subsidies to political parties' total income, South Korea relies more heavily on public funds for party income compared to African nations but less so than European countries. South Korea is often criticized for not effectively linking these subsidies with gender equality initiatives (Soh, 2011: 102; cited in Ohman, 2018: 63).
- ▶ According to the audit reports obtained for this study from the three main political parties, the share of national subsidies — including ordinary subsidies, election subsidies, the Public Funding for Women Candidates, and subsidies for candidates with disabilities — can surpass 50% of total party income during election years. Typically, ordinary subsidies alone constitute over 20% to 40% of the major parties' income, underscoring their substantial reliance on national subsidies. In 2021, the Democratic Party of Korea received approximately 2.1 billion won, the People Power Party about 1.8 billion won, and the Justice Party about 300 million won as the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, which accounts for 10% of their ordinary subsidies.

● Problems in the Execution of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development

- ▶ The Public Funding for Women's Political Development consists of political funds allocated for activities 'other than election expenses'. These funds are intended to be used for 'political activity expenditure', which are directly spent for political activities such as promoting or opposing policies, or recommending and supporting candidates for public office (National Election Commission, 2020a: 18-19).
- ▶ According to Kim and others (2019), an analysis of how five major political parties utilized the Public Funding for Women's Political Development in 2018 revealed that the largest portion of the fund was allocated to party officials' personnel expenses. In the meantime, expenditures were minimal or very low for education, policy development, organizational operations, and so on (Kim et al., 2019: 77).
- ▶ A study by Kwon, Yun, and Jo (2017) on the management of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development from 2004 to 2015 showed that political parties spent a portion of this fund as election-related expenses, despite also receiving specific election subsidies.

● Political Parties' Systems, Organizations, and Operational Programs for Developing Women Politicians

● Systems and Organizations for Developing Women Politicians

- ▶ The major political parties have constitutional regulations and rules about systems and organizations dedicated to developing women politicians. They support women politicians through specialized policy research institutes and related organizations.
- ▶ The People Power Party's constitution outlines the formation of special committees and the establishment of a Women's Policy Center within its Policy Research Institute to enhance women's political participation. However, as of March 2022, its Women's Bureau was consolidated with the Youth Bureau and the Vocational Capacity Bureau to create a new 'Future Bureau'.
- ▶ The Democratic Party of Korea emphasizes gender equality in its constitution and has set up committees and organizations to increase women's political participation. Its regulations also detail the establishment and role of its Women's Leadership Center. Additionally, the party operates relevant entities such as the Women's Bureau and the National Women's Committee within its central structure.
- ▶ The Justice Party's constitution and rules highlight the roles of women politicians in leadership, elections, and political participation. It channels its efforts through the Women's Committee and the Special Committee on Gender Rights within the party to advance women's rights and political engagement.

● Development of Women Politicians and Programs for Women Politicians by Political Party

- ▶ The People Power Party runs political education and leadership training programs for women, such as the 'Women's Political Academy', 'Good Society Leader Education', and so on. These programs are aimed at fostering women's leadership and nurturing women politicians.
- ▶ The Democratic Party of Korea operates the 'Democratic Women's Academy' to provide basic education on policy design for prospective women candidates in local elections. Also, through the 'Women's Political Academy' and the 'Democratic Party Women's Speech Contest', the party supports the enhancement of political knowledge and women's leadership.
- ▶ The Justice Party provides online educational opportunities specifically for women through the 'Feminism Political School', focusing on politics, feminism, family equality rights, and so on. The party also supports the political empowerment of women members via programs such as 'Women Political Leader Education' and 'Women's Political Leadership Academy', and so on.

Analysis of the Audit Reports on the Use of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development

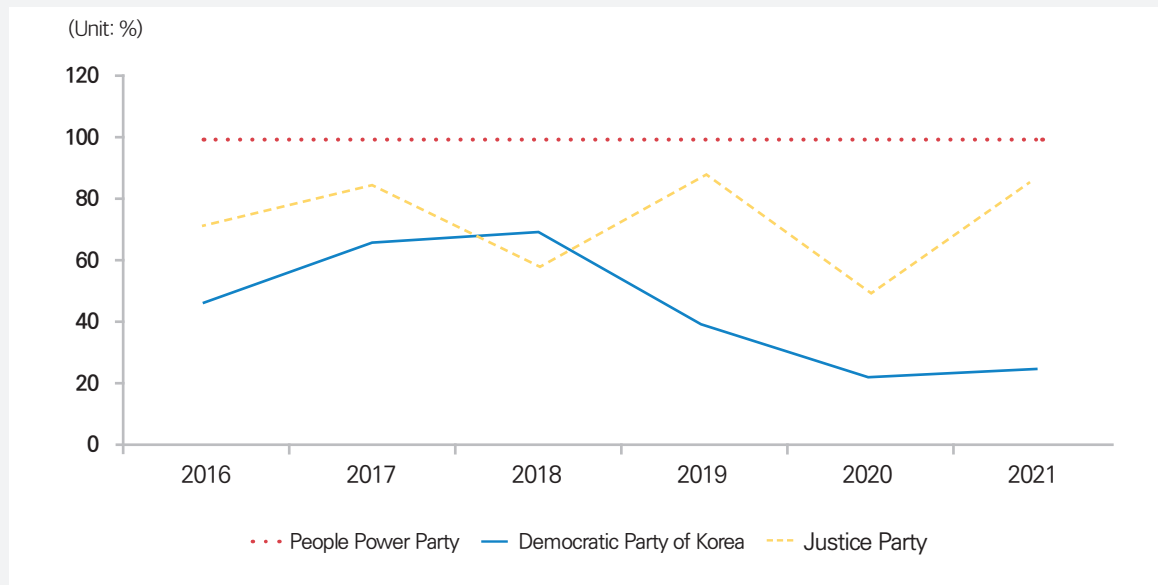
● Classification of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development

- ▶ Based on the details in the audit reports, the Public Funding for Women's Political Development was organized into five major categories including personnel expenses, education expenses, women candidates and election support expenses, policy development expenses, and organizational management expenses. Each category was further divided into sub-categories.
- ▶ The personnel expenses under the Public Funding for Women's Political Development actually refer to the expenses for women party officials, not women politicians. Despite regulations requiring that personnel expenses for party officials be covered by ordinary subsidies, political parties commonly use the Public Funding for Women's Political Development for party officials' personnel expenses. Although it is inappropriate to categorize these personnel expenses under the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, they were analyzed individually due to their significant share of expenditures.
- ▶ The education expenses were divided into three sub-categories based on contents: 'identification and nurturing of women politicians', 'awareness education on gender equality for party members', and 'sexual violence prevention education'. The women candidates and election support expenses solely encompassed expenditures explicitly recorded for women candidates and election support. The policy development expenses included activities related to policy and election pledge formulation, issue raising, and current issues resolution, and were sub-divided into 'meetings, seminars, discussions on the formulation of policies and election pledges' and 'research and commissioned studies'. The organizational management expenses covered the operational costs of entities such as women's bureaus, women's committees, or committees addressing women's issues, and included expenses for facilities, materials, travels, and more. They also accounted for costs associated with women's meetings, study groups, learning clubs, book purchases, and the operation of a gender-based violence reporting and counseling center to address sexual violation incidents within parties. Additionally, they encompassed expenses for exchanges with external organizations and sponsorships.

● Expenditure Trends on the Public Funding for Women's Political Development by Category (2016-2021)

- ▶ The People Power Party had the highest expenditure rates for personnel expenses, while the Democratic Party of Korea saw an increase from 2016 to 2018 followed by a decrease thereafter. On the other hand, for the Justice Party, expenditure rates for personnel expenses dropped during National Assembly election and local elections years, then rose in other years. The National Election Commission's authoritative interpretation allows the use of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development to cover personnel expenses for party officials. However, considering the fundamental purpose of the funding, which is the advancement of women's political development, it is recommended that this practice be completely avoided in the future.

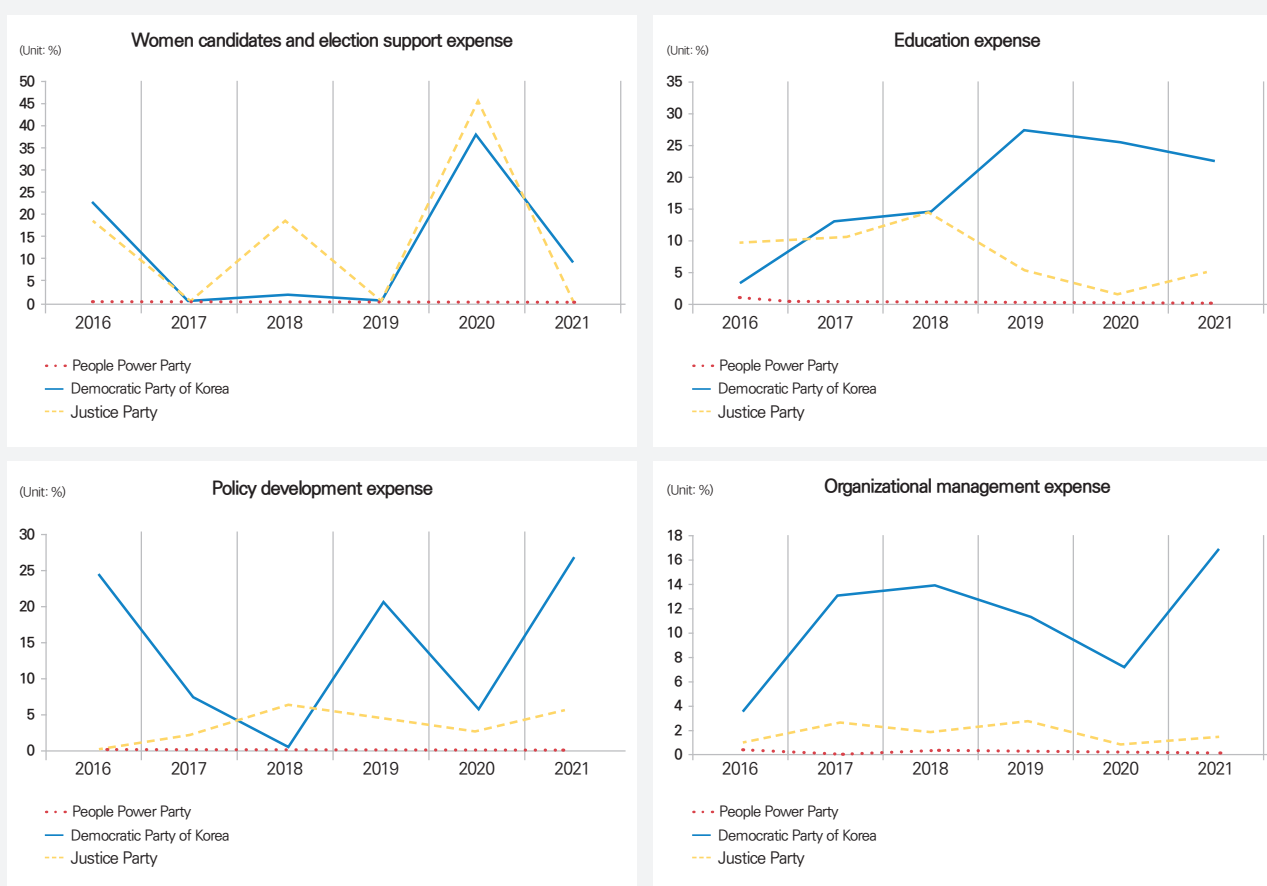
<Figure 1> Trends in Personnel Expenses by Political Party



- ▶ The Democratic Party of Korea increased its expenditure rates on education expenses from 2016. The People Power Party had the lowest expenditure rates among the three parties and did not allocate any funds for education expenses in 2017 and 2020. The Justice Party initially increased its expenditure rates for education from 2016 to 2018 but subsequently decreased them.
- ▶ The Democratic Party of Korea increased its expenditure rates for the women candidates and election support expenses during the 20th and 21st general elections. The People Power Party allocated less than 0.1% to this category in 2016 and showed no expenditures on this category afterward. The Justice Party's expenditure rates on the women candidates and election support expenses reached about 18% during the 20th general election and the 7th local election, and rose to 46% during the 21st general election.
- ▶ The Democratic Party of Korea experienced a decline in expenditure rates for the policy development expenses, which dropped from 24.36% in 2016 to 0.61% in 2018, before maintaining levels between 20% and 30% from 2019 onward. The People Power Party consistently had extremely low expenditure rates (ranging from 0.05% to 0.25%) from 2016 to 2018, with no expenditures allocated to policy development from 2019 to 2021. The Justice Party saw expenditure rates increase from 0.17% in 2016 to 6.33% in 2018, followed by a decrease until 2020, before rising again to 5.96% in 2021.
- ▶ This study confirmed that despite separate accounting for personnel expenses in the audit reports, political parties were using the Public Funding for Women's Political Development to cover personnel expenses. Notably, the People Power Party was using almost all of this funding to cover their personnel expenses. Consequently, it is necessary to make a concrete regulation regarding the utilization of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development.

- ▶ Despite receiving election subsidies and, in some cases, the Public Funding for Women Candidates, the political parties made expenditures for the women candidates and election support expenses by using the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, which is equivalent to the expenditure 'other than election expenses'. However, these expenditures were not detailed in the audit reports. To enhance transparency, it is crucial to report these expenditure details precisely and comprehensively.
- ▶ The Democratic Party of Korea typically incurred higher rates of organizational management expenses compared to the other two parties. While spending on organizational management is unavoidable, it is essential to manage these expenses appropriately and maintain a balance. This approach helps prevent financial imbalances that could compromise funding for women's education or policy development.

<Figure 2> Expenditure Trends on the Public Funding for Women's Political Development by Political Party



Analysis of the Audit Reports on the Use of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development

- ▶ The Public Funding for Women Candidates was introduced approximately 20 years ago with the aim of encouraging political parties to nominate more women for local elections. However, this initiative has had limited success. As a result, it is often proposed to replace financial incentives for meeting quotas with financial penalties for failing to do so.
- ▶ Political parties have supported women candidates exclusively through the Public Funding for Women Candidates, which is provided as separate incentives from election subsidies. Despite receiving at least 1 billion won in national subsidies as the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, political parties currently lack a dedicated workforce to manage these funds effectively.
- ▶ The majority of women politicians remain unaware of public projects due to a lack of active communications among central parties, provincial-level parties, and provincial-level parties' women's committees. To improve awareness and engagement, central parties should not only disclose the total amount of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development but also share full information on public projects and recent expenditure details with women politicians.
- ▶ The Public Funding for Women's Political Development should be distributed between central and provincial-level parties. Improved communication and decentralization are essential for managing the fund effectively. Additionally, it is crucial to clearly define the amount of the fund that provincial-level parties receive.
- ▶ The payment method for the Public Funding for Women Candidates should be re-evaluated, and its effectiveness assessed. Furthermore, it is essential to include accounting-related training in election education for women candidates.
- ▶ The use of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development should involve consultations with women politicians. However, the funding has often been used without relevance to the women politicians, many of whom are unaware of the existence of this fund. To address this, both central and local-level women politicians need to engage in open discussions on the Public Funding for Women's Political Development.

Measures to Improve and Revitalize the Public Funding for Women Candidates and the Public Funding for Women's Political Development

● Measures to Improve the Management of the Public Funding for Women Candidates

● Introduction of the Public Funding for Women Elected

- ▶ This study suggests transitioning from the Public Funding for Women Candidates, which is currently based on nominations, to the Public Funding for Women Elected, which is based on the actual number of women who win elections. Similarly to the existing system, the proposed Public Funding for Women Elected would be an additional support in a form of national subsidies. The key difference lies in the basis of fund allocation: moving from counting nominated women candidates to focusing on those who are successfully elected.
- ▶ Countries including Chile, Croatia, and the Solomon Islands allocate subsidies based on the number of elected candidates. In Croatia, political parties receive an additional 10% on top of their existing subsidies. In Chile and the Solomon Islands, the addition varies based on the number of women elected. Conversely, in South Korea, Ethiopia, and Romania, subsidies are granted based on the number of women candidates nominated, and those subsidies for women politicians are generally the least binding (Ohman, 2018: 21).
- ▶ Introducing the Public Funding for Women Elected is expected to discourage the practice of political parties nominating women candidates for districts that are unlikely to result in winning elections.

● Expansion in the Application of the Public Funding for Women Candidates to the Local Government Leader Elections

- ▶ The Public Funding for Women Candidates aims to incentivize political parties' nomination of women candidates. Given this goal, the study recommends expanding the scope of the Public Funding for Women Candidates to include candidates for local government leadership positions in metropolitan and municipal areas, where the nominations for women are typically low.
- ▶ Women's communities have historically paid limited attention to the roles of women as local government leaders in metropolitan and municipal areas. The proposed policy of restricting the Public Funding for Women Candidates specifically to these leadership positions could emphasize the need to broaden the nomination of women candidates in these areas. Such a policy shift would also invigorate the ongoing discussions on expanding women's political participation.

● Introduction of the Election Subsidy Reduction System (Financial Sanction)

- ▶ The Public Funding for Women Candidates is currently structured as financial rewards. However, this study confirmed that the support provided through the Public Funding for Women Candidates is often under-utilized, and some political parties fail to disburse the financial rewards to the women candidates. Strong measures are needed to rectify this issue.

- ▶ To enhance the effectiveness of national subsidy schemes for political parties, it is necessary to implement the most stringent financial sanction available: subsidy cuts. This approach entails reducing specified proportions of election subsidies if certain conditions are not met, rather than providing additional funds if certain conditions are satisfied.
- ▶ Countries including Albania, Burkina Faso, France, Honduras, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal implement subsidy cuts. These nations reduce government subsidies by 20% unless at least 30% of the nominations are women (Ohman, 2018: 25).

● **Measures to Revitalize the Public Funding for Women's Political Development**

● **Appointment of Dedicated Personnel for Managing the Public Funding for Women's Political Development**

- ▶ It is crucial to appoint central party secretariats' salaried party officials as dedicated personnel responsible solely for managing the Public Funding for Women's Political Development.
- ▶ This study recommends appointing the aforementioned dedicated personnel separately, ensuring they are not included in the existing count of salaried party officials.

● **Regulations on the Use of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development and Establishment of Full-Time Workforce Regulations**

- ▶ In order to improve and revitalize the management of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, this study proposes a formulation of Article 28(2) of the Political Funds Act to clarify the objectives of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development. Also, it suggests an amendment to Article 30 of the Political Parties Act to mandate the appointment of a sufficient number of dedicated, full-time salaried clerical staff proportional to the subsidies received.

● **Regulations on Maximum Limits for Each Expenditure Item**

- ▶ This study found considerable variation in how the political parties spend the Public Funding for Women's Political Development, with none adhering to strict guidelines. To solve this issue, it is essential to define detailed execution items for the fund, ensuring that expenditure proportions for each category and item are clearly documented.
- ▶ Given the current operating expenses, the maximum limits for each expenditure item should be set as follows: 40% on personnel expenses, 25% on policy development expenses, 25% on education expenses, 5% on election support expenses, and 5% on organizational management expenses.

- ▶ When amending Article 28 of the Political Funds Act (The Public Funding for Women's Political Development), the first step to securing the effectiveness of the fund would be to provide guidelines for upper limits on each expenditure item.

Release of Audit Reports on National Subsidies

- ▶ The Public Funding for Women's Political Development constitutes only 10% of political parties' ordinary operational expenses. Therefore, it is essential to inspect how the remaining 90% of the ordinary operational expenses are managed in order to ensure they are administered through transparent and democratic processes.
- ▶ Essentially, a transparent audit reporting system must be implemented for all national subsidies provided to political parties.

Formulation of Mid- to Long-term Plans

- ▶ Similar to elections, the Public Funding for Women's Political Development operates on a yearly basis at a short-term level. However, to effectively support activities and empower women politicians, mid- to long-term plans should be formulated and implemented, integrating elements such as awareness raising and education.
- ▶ By establishing mid- to long-term plans in order to consistently allocate the Public Funding for Women's Political Development across appropriate phases, political parties would have the opportunity to implement diverse and impactful projects.

<Table> Summary of Improvement Measures and Policy Recommendations on National Subsidies for Political Parties

Category	Policy Improvement Measures
The Public Funding for Women Candidates	1. Introduction of the Public Funding for Women Elected: To allocate funds proportional to the number of women who are successfully elected 2. Expansion of the Public Funding for Women Candidates to local government leader elections 3. Introduction of the election subsidy reduction system (financial sanction)
The Public Funding for Women's Political Development	1. Appointment of dedicated personnel for the management of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development 2. Regulations on the use of the Public Funding for Women's Political Development and the establishment of relevant full-time workforce regulations 3. Regulations on maximum limits for each expenditure item 4. Release of audit reports on national subsidies 5. Formulation of mid- to long-term plans

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Responsible ministry: : National Election Commission

Related ministries : National Assembly Research Service, Political parties