

Abstract

Research on the status and roles of female staff in political parties with a focus on their experiences of internal and external networking

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Part of the reasons behind political parties' reluctance to designate female candidates for public elections in South Korea lies in the dynamics of organizational operation. Assuming that party headquarters represent the level of democracy implemented within their corresponding parties, this research examines intra-party gender dynamics by looking at the operation of party headquarters. For its staff, a political party can be a peculiar kind of workplace in the sense that it is not only a workplace but also a place that provides them with a chance to develop their political career.

Due to the nature of political parties, party headquarters can be both a workplace and a gateway to enter politics for party staff. Albeit not a direct route to become politicians, those who work for party headquarters often have a chance to develop personal networks with incumbent politicians since the main part of their job involves interacting with them.

This research attempts to understand the organizational culture (or the degree of democratic operation) and operational dynamics of political parties from the perspective of gender equality by investigating the differences between male and female party staff in the experience of human resource management, tasks assigned, and networking.

First, we reviewed theories on the functions and roles of political parties, social networks, and women's representation in terms of the expansion of women's political representation. Second, we examined the status of female staff, organizational structure, and policies of major parties. Third, we conducted a survey of both male and female staff in regard to the years of work, networking, and level of gender equality in their organizations. Fourth, we performed in-depth interviews with female staff members as to their perception of gender equality and experience of using networks in conducting their tasks. Last, we made policy suggestions regarding enhancing empowerment programs and systematic support for networking for female party staff with a goal to promote their status and roles within male-oriented party organizations.

Policy measures suggested based on the findings of this research include: 1) establishing an enabling infrastructure; 2) improving human resource management; 3) promoting female leadership and mentoring for female staff; 4) gender equality education for party staff; 5) promoting the use of the Women's Political Development

Fund; and 6) introduction of gender mainstreaming policies and mandatory gender sensitivity education within political parties.

Keywords: female party staff, social networking, status and role of female staff, women's political representation, gender politics.