

1. A rambling Saturday afternoon thread on Korean politics:

The major parties disagree vehemently on two things, North Korea and the legacy of military dictatorships

Beyond that, they share a great deal of DNA passed down in establishment politics since the Park Cheong-Hee era.

2. That includes:

(1) state-led economic development, in collaboration with Chaebol

(2) appealing to regional interests with big infrastructure projects

(3) ideologically-driven North Korea policy

(4) reactionary conservatism on social issues (womens', LGBT, minority rights)

3. Korea's electoral system, which has no meaningful primaries and imposes high financial barriers on political newcomers, allows these core values to be propagated across generations in a closed political class. The faces change, for the most part the ideas don't.

4. This results in a growing disconnect between the median opinion of the political class and the general public. Let's take LGBT rights for example. Public opinion consistently polls as being somewhere around early 2000s America. (~30% support for legalized same-sex marriage.)

5. The vast majority of the National Assembly, on the other hand, acts like basic civil rights legislation is electoral suicide. Part of that's far-right church groups, but it also conveniently lines up with the worldview of the sort of people who are allowed to go into politics.

6. In other words, because the overwhelming majority of politicians came of age in the 80s, and were later hand-picked and mentored by old guard politicians of the 80s, they're incapable of conceiving that anything not within the Overton Window in the 80s is in it now.

7. The counterargument is that LGBT rights and other modern political issues don't sell to the larger electorate. In my view that's a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy, because there are no prominent politicians or taste-makers bothering to set the agenda on that sort of thing.

8. But make no mistake, there's an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement within the Korean population. A generation of people are growing up and finding their values reflected nowhere in politics, the political media, or political commentary.

9. (and I'm not just saying there's a new "woke" generation coming up. This goes in both ideological directions. I.e., young conservative-leaners more interested in anti-PC culture and laissez faire economics than inventing reasons why Syngman Rhee's massacres were NBD).

10. This is nowhere near a cohesive political trend for now, but in ten years when millenials are a majority of the electorate and politics is still same old same old?

There might be a tidal wave coming. One that the existing political establishment is woefully underprepared for

11. As a squeamish classical liberal-ish person who's not a fan of radical populism on any side, this leaves me quite concerned.

Politics has to cycle in new ideas every once in a while to fit the zeitgeist. Korean politics hasn't done that on a large scale in 3 decades. /end