

Lee Tae-gu, president of American Political Science Association
**‘Deportation decisions based on race in U.S. could become
serious human rights issue’**
**‘2 presidents impeached in 10 years; I admire the dynamism of Korean
democracy’**



In an interview with Yonhap News, Lee Tae-gu, president of the American Political Science Association, emphasized, “What’s more important is that the threat to survival, rather than political hope, drove the action.”

“There is a tendency for deportation decisions to be based on race and political affiliation, which can lead to serious human rights issues.”

Lee Tae-gu, president of the American Political Science Association and professor of humanities at Harvard University, who visited Korea to attend the Seoul General Assembly of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), said this in an interview with Yonhap News Agency on July 14 at a joint reception hosted by the Overseas Koreans Agency and the Korean Political Science Association at the Sono Felice Convention in Gangnam-gu, Seoul.

“This visit to Korea holds great personal significance for me,” he said. “I am deeply moved by the thought that the path my parents chose in emigrating to the United States before I was even born has led me here.”

**‘Political threats lead to participation; universal policies
are urgently needed’**

Lee is a political scientist who taught for nearly 20 years as a professor of political science at the UC Berkeley School of Law. He has served as an advisory member of the U.S. Census Bureau, a senior fellow at the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Civic Engagement Coalition and an advisory member of the Korean American Political Alliance (KAPA), focusing on issues of race and ethnicity, immigration and identity, and political and social inequality.

He first attributed the long-standing low political participation of Koreans and Asian Americans to “the failure of both political parties to seriously consider Asians as voters.”

“While Whites, Blacks and Latinos are politically organized, there has been a strong perception that Asians, despite their growing numbers, lack political weight.”

‘Political participation is not a choice but a matter of survival’

However, he said, this trend has been shifting over the past 10 to 20 years.

“As Korean Americans have settled in the United States for a long time, they have come to recognize the need for securing political rights and influence beyond economic and educational success,” Lee said. “There is a growing awareness that political participation is a



Lee Tae-gu is interviewed by Yonhap News at a joint reception by the OKA and the Korean Political Science Association at the Sono Felice Convention in Gangnam-gu, Seoul, on July 14.

way to demonstrate a sense of belonging in a new society.”

In particular, the rise in hate crimes and racial discrimination since the inauguration of President Donald Trump’s administration in 2016 has served as a powerful catalyst for political participation.

“President Trump’s anti-immigrant policies and the rise of anti-Asian hate have heightened the sense of crisis. With the support of NGOs and local organizations, Korean American and Asian American voters are responding in an organized manner.

“It’s important to note that the threat to survival, rather than political hope, has driven action. Hate crimes have deepened the perception of the socially vulnerable and have fueled the spread of identity politics.”

Wealth inequality in United States is very severe

Lee also emphasized the importance of universalist policies.

“Policies that affect everyone are paramount,” he said. “In particular, wealth inequality in the United States is so severe that democracy itself is threatened.”

He pointed out that the top 1 percent owns far more wealth than the bottom 20 percent and proposed wealth redistribution, universal health insurance and strengthened education policies as solutions.

He also expressed concern about the recent controversy surrounding Korean Americans facing deportation due to

insufficient documentation. Lee expressed concern, saying: “Approximately 200,000 Korean Americans are at risk of deportation, and this is not limited to undocumented immigrants. Deportation decisions tend to be determined based on race and political affiliation, which could lead to serious human rights issues.”

He suggested that diplomatic responses from the Korean government and organized action by the Korean community are necessary solutions. He emphasized that a joint response within an international alliance could be the solution, saying, “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OKA must actively intervene to establish protective measures, and local Koreans must also unite and strengthen their political power.”

‘We must be selective about information and accept it critically’

Lee advised the next generation to “take on events in the world with a broad perspective and accurate observations. The ability to select and critically accept information is key to maintaining a democratic society in the future.”

Finally, he praised Korean democracy, saying: “It’s hard to imagine the impeachment of two presidents in the past decade in the United States. I deeply admire the vitality and dynamism of Korean democracy.” 장