

Polity IV Country Report 2007: North Korea

Score:	2006	2007	Change	<p style="font-size: small;">Authority Trends, 1948-2007: North Korea</p>		
Polity:	-9	-9	0			
Democ:	0	0	0			
Autoc:	9	9	0			
Durable:	59					
Tentative:	No					
SCODE	PRK	CCODE	731	Date of Report	1 November 2008	
Polity IV Component Variables						
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP	
2	1	4	1	4	1	
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)						
End Date			Begin Date			
			1 May 1948 (Ind.)			
Polity Fragmentation: No						
Constitution	1948 (1972, 1992, 1998)					
Executive(s)	National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong Il; initially gained power as leader of the Korean Workers' Party upon the death of his father, Kim Il Sung, in July 1994; confirmed in this post by the Supreme People's Assembly in August 1998					
Legislature	Unicameral: Supreme People's Assembly (687 seats; members elected unopposed; most recent elections, 3 August 2003; all members represent a single bloc, the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland [and its satellite parties, the Korean Social Democratic Party and the Chondoist Chongu Party], and are pre-approved by the leadership of the Korean Workers' Party)					
Judiciary	Central Court					

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)

Following its liberation from the Japanese in WWII, the Korean peninsula was divided into two occupation zones. Of these two zones, the northern region was controlled by the Soviet Union and became the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This isolationist communist state has since this time been controlled by the Workers' Party of Korea (KWP) under the personalist leadership of Kim Il Sung (1948-1994) and his son, Kim Jong Il (1994-present). Kim Jung Il became the country's de-facto supreme ruler after his father's illness and death in 1994. In 1997, he was formally confirmed as the Secretary General of

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the KWP, and in August 1998 the legislature hand-picked by the party rubber-stamped his confirmation as the National Defense Commission Chairman and declared his post “the highest office of state.” By the same resolution, the legislature proclaimed Kim Jong Il’s late father “eternal president” of the country while abolishing the presidency as an active office.

For years the health of Kim Jong-Il has been a matter of serious speculation. While some analysts have claimed that he died in 2003, nonetheless, the official position of US intelligence agencies is that he suffered a serious stroke in September 2008 and is now “gravely ill.” Kim's three sons and his son-in-law, along with O Kuk-ryol, an army general, have been noted as possible successors, but the North Korean government has refused to comment either on the health of Kim Jong-Il or the line of succession in the KWP.

Executive Constraints: Unlimited Authority (1)

After decades of Kim Il Sung’s rule, North Korea turned into a personalist dictatorship with the ruler standing above the party structure. The regime intensively promotes a “personality cult” of Kim Il Sung (the “Great Leader”) and of his son Kim Jong Il (the ‘Dear Leader’). The legislators’ election and activity is entirely controlled by the party and state bureaucracy. The full membership of the legislature rarely meets, and most of its day-to-day work is carried out by the 15-member Standing Committee. The constitutional provisions for an independent judiciary and fair trials are not implemented in practice. The courts, like all other institutions, are under firm control of the hegemonic party.

Political Participation: Repressed Competition (1)

All organized opposition groups are officially banned. By continuous policy of strict surveillance of the entire population, internal opposition to the hegemonic party (KWP) has effectively been eliminated. The Government prohibits freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and association, and all forms of cultural and media activities are under the tight control of the party. Citizens have to be loyal to the KWP in order to advance in the society, and the 20% of the population deemed “hostile,” such as the children of former feudal landlords, Christians, and relatives of defectors, have virtually no rights.