

Polity IV Country Report 2007: South Korea

Score:	2006	2007	Change			
Polity:	8	8	0			
Democ:	8	8	0			
Autoc:	0	0	0			
Durable:		19				
Tentative:		No				
SCODE	ROK	CCODE	732	Date of Report	1 November 2008	
Polity IV Component Variables						
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP	
3	3	4	6	2	4	
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)						
End Date	29 June 1987		Begin Date	26 February 1988		
Polity Fragmentation: No						
Constitution	29 October 1987					
Executive(s)	President Lee Myung-bak (UD); directly elected 19 December 2007, 48.7%					
Legislature	Unicameral: National Assembly (299 seats; 245 directly elected, 54 proportionally elected; most recent elections, 9 April 2008) Grand National Party (GNP): 153 United New Democratic Party (UNDP): 81 Liberty Forward Party (LFP): 18 Park Geun Hye Coalition (PGH): 14 Other parties: 8 Non-partisans: 25					
Judiciary	Constitutional Court; Supreme Court					

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

South Korea's longtime dissident Kim Dae Jung won the December 1997 presidential election on behalf of the National Congress for New Politics (subsequently renamed the Millennium Democratic Party, MDP) marking the first-ever shift of political power to the opposition from the ruling parties in the nation's history. The elections were deemed free and fair by independent observers, with three major candidates competing for votes, in campaigns that were not marred by reports of violence or fraud. December 2002 presidential elections resulted in the narrow victory of MDP candidate Roh Moo Hyun (48.9%) over Grand

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National Party (GNP) candidate Lee Hoi Chang (46.6%); the election included four other minor candidates. Roh was constitutionally prohibited from running for a third term in the December 2007 presidential election; the election was won by GNP candidate Lee Myung Bak.

Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)

Since a 1961 coup, South Korea's politics and government were dominated by the military; while the military has receded into the background, ongoing tensions with North Korea require the preeminence of security institutions and, so, the military's influence over politics can not be discounted. The transition to civilian government was initiated in the late 1980s and consolidated by the early 1990s. The present constitution subjects executive authority to substantial constraints by the legislature. Legislative consent is required for the president's appointment of a prime minister. The president may not dissolve the National Assembly. The president may declare martial law, but he or she must repeal it at the National Assembly's request. The legislature has the authority to propose the impeachment of the president, recommend the removal of the prime minister and other Cabinet members, and investigate the government. After the April 2000 elections, President Kim Dae Jung's Millennium Democratic (MDP) party (42% of the seats) remained second to the Grand National (GNP) party (49%); 2002 by-elections increased the GNP share to a legislative majority, further constraining the power of newly elected President Roh Moo Hyun of the MDP. With relative parity in the legislature, political compromises are necessary in order to effect policy. South Korea's judiciary has shown increasing independence in recent years; however, the image of judges was damaged by several scandals concerning alleged illegal influence and cronyism.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Limited and/or Decreasing Overt Coercion (9)

South Korea's political parties are relatively young and still fluid in nature; all major parties active in 2000 were organized between 1990 and 1995. The parties retain factional, parochial, and personalistic qualities, although there is a discernible trend toward the development of broader and more inclusive political blocs. Some members of the security forces were responsible for occasional human rights abuses. Whereas human rights and civil liberties remain subject to potential restrictions envisaged by the National Security Law (NSL), observers point out improvements in the government's respect to human rights of its citizens. President Kim Dae Jung continued to urge that sections of the NSL be revised to better protect human rights. The president's "sunshine policy" of actively seeking to improve relations with the North with the aim of eventual reunification remains controversial despite the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts; President Roh has continued the "sunshine policy" despite worsening relations between North Korea and the United States. Political discourse remains fairly volatile as social groups frequently stage street demonstrations and call strikes in protest of government policies. In March 2004 President Roh was impeached by a National Assembly vote of 193-2. The country's first ever impeachment bill was sponsored by the opposition Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) and the Grand National Party (GNP) on the grounds that Roh had violated his constitutional neutrality by a statement in February encouraging people to vote for the Uri Party in legislative elections scheduled for 15 April. Those elections were won by the recently formed Uri Party, which displaced the GNP as the dominant party in the legislature. Victory by the Uri Party was seen as a sign that the electorate rejected Roh's impeachment. Indeed, the Constitutional Court, which had 180 days to either accept or reject the impeachment, dismissed charges of corruption and economic mismanagement against Roh and reinstated him to office on 14 May 2004, leaving him with greater public support than before the trial. A charge of illegal electioneering was upheld but deemed insufficient to warrant impeachment. Presidential and legislative elections held in early 2008 resulted in victories for the Grand National Party.