

REPUBLIC OF KOREA (SOUTH KOREA)

Continent: Asia
Population: 51,744,876
Life Expectancy (at Birth):
Governance System: Presidential Republic

Capital: Seoul
Area: 97520 km²
Major Languages: Korean
GDP (2021): US\$1.8 Trillion

Select Global Rankings

Human Development Index: 19th
Fragile States Index - Inverted: 21st
Soft Power 30 rank: 19th

Human Freedom Index: 31st
World Happiness Ranking: 59th
Good Country Index: 37

Elite Sport System Rankings

Global Cup Ranking: 18th
Per Capita Cup Ranking: 36th

Olympic Medals – Summer '20: 20 (15th)
Olympic Medals – Winter '22: 9 (14th)

Football/World Cup Profile

FIFA Region: AFC
FIFA Ranking: 28
World Cup Appearances: 10
Best World Cup Performance(s): 2002 (fourth place)

Qualification: AFC 3rd Round 2nd place
World Cup Group: H
Last World Cup Appearance: 2018

SOUTH KOREA in INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (by Cassandra Ascenzi)

Officially established as a sovereign state in 1948 by the United States Army Military Government in cosulation with the United Nations after its three-years-long occupation of the Southern half of the Korean peninsula,¹ The Republic of Korea (South Korea) has endured a number of political transformations and upheavals over the course of its statehood that have influenced the ways it conducts its international relations.

Despite having been first established as a presidential system via the passage of its constitution that same year, the decade-long conflict between the state's first president—the 'ultra-nationalist' revolutionary Syngman Rhee—and the National Assembly that had elected him,² and the extensive guerrilla incursions that took place both leading up to and occurring during the Korean War (1950-1953) between the state's Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) and North Korea's Korean People's Army (KPA) (whose armaments had been provided by the United States Far East Command (FECOM) and the Stalin administration respectively) had resulted in a capture of power by a

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War>

² <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Korea/History>

military junta led by General Park Chung-Hee on May 16, 1961.³ Under this regime, all political activity was banned until domestic and international pressure forced Park to hold an election on October 15, 1963.

After narrowly winning this election, political unrest amassed within the state at several points over the course of the 1970s—most notably in the aftermath of the August 1973 kidnapping of Kim Dae-Jung, an anti-government activist who had been campaigning in the United States and Japan, by agents of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA); and in the aftermath of the assassination of President Park by KCIA director and longtime friend Kim Jae-Kyu—and the state was placed once again under military rule by General Chun Doo-Hwan in August 1980. After an additional year under martial law, General Chun was reelected under the new constitution, and a new political party, the Democratic Justice Party (DJP), was created by former members of the Democratic Republic Party (DRP) and New Democratic Party.

Despite the strengthened U.S-South Korea relations that amassed during this time with the election of President Ronald Reagan in the United States in 1980, another series of international events—such as the bombing conducted by North Korea in Burma (now Myanmar) in October 1983 that killed several members of the South Korean government—evoked popular dissatisfaction that would result Roh Tae-Woo, the chairman of the DJP party, producing a series of constitutional reforms and basic civil rights in order to reestablish what had been abolished under the previous military rule.

Under this new constitution, with Roh being elected the new leader in February 1988, South Korea pursued a number of efforts on the international stage in accordance with ‘northern diplomacy’ policy implemented by Roh. These efforts would result in not only restrengthened diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union in 1990 and newly forged ties with Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia in 1998, but also the improvement in relations between the state and China in 1992. After a few more years of political turmoil within the state, the state of South Korea’s international relations began to improve again, with new leader Kim Dae-Jung, elected in 1998, hosting a historic summit with North Korean Leader Kim Jong Il in 2000, and South Korea making it to the fourth round of the FIFA Men’s World Cup—the highest an Asian team had advanced up until that point.

After a few more years of stability, the state faced a scandal under the presidency of Park Geun-Hye—the first woman elected president of South Korea—with the sinking of the ferry Sewol—what was later found to have serious structural problems that had been ignored due to lax safety regulations in place—that resulted in the deaths of all but 172 of the 500 passengers on board. During her 2012 campaign, however, Park—also

³ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War>

the daughter of General Chun—offered a public apology with respect to the human rights abuses that had been conducted under her father’s rule. Nevertheless, her administration’s subsequent scandal of creating its own history book to replace the ‘pro-North Korean’ slant of the existing history textbook resulted in the calling of a snap election in 2012 that would put President Moon Jae-In in power.⁴

Today

South Korea has aimed to “promote friendly and cooperative relations with other countries”.⁵ In order to do so, the state has maintained foreign relations with 191 countries, and amongst them, manages 115 resident embassies, 5 permanent missions, and 47 consulate generals.⁶ In addition to this, South Korea is a member of international organization such as ASEAN, UNESCO, IMF, APEC, IAEA, ILO, and WHO, having joined the United Nations in 1991, and the OECD in 1996.

For the work it conducts as a member of these organizations, South Korea makes use of its economic strength by pursuing international cooperation efforts for peacekeeping, economic stabilization, and environmental conservation. A number of key events geared toward international operation that South Korea has hosted include the Nuclear Security Summit Seoul 2012 discussing measures to block nuclear terrorism; the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in 2014 aiming to deepen trust and partnership between the state and ASEAN; the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to demonstrate the success of the state’s modernization from developing nation to donor nation; and the UN Green Climate Fund aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help vulnerable people across the globe “adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change”.⁷

Furthermore, South Korea’s Korea International Cooperation Agency provides Official Development Assistance (ODA) of US\$400-500 million to developing countries in Asia and Africa. This funding contributes to a number of sectors centred within the countries’ economies such as health, education, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, public administration, and industrial energy.⁸

As of the rule of newly elected leader, Yoon Suk-yeoul, South Korea aims to further strengthen its ties with the United States by forging a “comprehensive strategic

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Korea/History>

⁵ <https://www.korea.net/Government/Constitution-and-Government/International-Relations>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

alliance”.⁹ With respect to North Korea, however, the state plans to take a more hard-lined approach pushing for strengthened defence and deterrence while keeping dialogue open. With respect to China and Japan South Korea intends to respectively establish and restore bilateral relations based on mutual respect. Lastly, with respect to South Korea’s international efforts, the state intends to broaden in scope beyond peninsular activities in order to expand the role that South Korea plays in “[advancing freedom, peace, and prosperity through liberal democratic values and substantial cooperation” on the global stage.¹⁰

⁹ <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/south-korea-election-new-president-yoon-foreign-policy>

¹⁰ Ibid.