

# Republic of Korea



An independent kingdom for much of its long history, Korea was occupied by Japan beginning in 1905 following the Russo-Japanese War. In 1910, Tokyo formally annexed the entire Peninsula. Korea regained its independence following Japan's surrender to the US in 1945. After World War II, a democratic-based government (Republic of Korea, ROK) was set up in the southern half of the Korean Peninsula while a communist-style government was installed in the north (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK).

During the Korean War (1950-53), US troops and UN forces fought alongside ROK soldiers to defend South Korea from a DPRK invasion supported by China and the Soviet Union. A 1953 armistice split the Peninsula along a demilitarized zone at about the 38th parallel. PARK Chung-hee took over leadership of the country in a 1961 coup. During his regime, from 1961 to 1979, South Korea achieved rapid economic growth, with per capita income rising to roughly 17 times the level of North Korea.

In December 2016, the National Assembly passed an impeachment motion against President PARK over her alleged involvement in a corruption and influence-peddling scandal, immediately suspending her presidential authorities and establishing Prime Minister HWANG Kyo-ahn as Acting President. The impeachment was upheld in March 2017, triggering an early presidential election on 9 May 2017.

South Korea will host the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. Discord with North Korea has permeated inter-Korean relations for much of the past decade, highlighted by the North's attacks on a South Korean ship and island in 2010, the exchange of artillery fire across the DMZ, and multiple nuclear and missile tests in 2016, and missile tests in 2017.

## Geography

**Official name:** Republic of Korea

**Short-form Conventional:** South Korea

**Region:** Asia

**Area:** 99,720 sq km

**Bordering Countries:** North Korea

**Physical Features:** Primarily hills and mountains, with wide coastal plains in the west and south.

**Climate:** Temperate, with rainfall heavier in summer than winter; cold winters.

**Natural Hazards:** Occasional typhoons bring high winds and floods; low-level seismic activity is common the in southwest.

## People and Society

**Population:** 50,924,172 (28th in the world)

**Ethnic Groups:** Homogenous

**Official Language:** Korean

**Other Languages Spoken:** English (widely taught in Junior High and High Schools)

**Religions:** Protestant (19.7%), Buddhist (15.5%), Catholic (7.9%), None (56.9%)

**Capital City:** Seoul

*\*Note – Sejong, located roughly 120km South of Seoul, is being developed as a new capital*

**Other Major Cities:** Busan, Daegu, Daejeon, Gwangju, Incheon, and Ulsan

**Median Age** (*half the people are younger than this age and half are older*)

Male: 39.7

Female: 42.8

Total population: 41.2

**Literacy Rate** (*percentage of the population 15 and older who can read and write*)

Male: 99.2%

Female: 96.6%

Total population: 97.9%

**Life Expectancy at Birth** (*average number of years to be lived by those born in the same year*)

Male: 79.3

Female: 85.8

Total population: 82.4

## Government

**Country Founded:** August 15, 1945 (independence from Japan)

**Type of Government:** Presidential Republic

### **Country leaders**

President: [Moon Jae-in](#)

Prime Minister: [Hwang Kyo-ahn](#)

**Allies:** [USA](#), [Japan](#), [other nations on the South China Sea](#)

**Enemies:** [North Korea](#), [China](#), [Russia](#)

### **Economy**

South Korea over the past four decades has demonstrated incredible economic growth and global integration to become a high-tech industrialized economy. In the 1960s, GDP per capita was comparable with levels in the poorer countries of Africa and Asia. In 2004, South Korea joined the trillion-dollar club of world economies.

**Currency:** [Korean Won \(KRW\)](#)

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** [\\$1.929 trillion](#)

**Natural Resources:** [Coal](#), [tungsten](#), [graphite](#), [molybdenum](#), [lead](#), [hydropower potential](#)

**Unemployment Rate:** [3.7% \(2016 est.\)](#)

**Population Below Poverty Line:** [12.5% \(2015 est.\)](#)

#### **Major Exports and Imports**

Exports: [semiconductors](#), [petrochemicals](#), [automobile/auto parts](#), [ships](#), [wireless communication equipment](#), [flat display displays](#), [steel](#), [electronics](#), [plastics](#), [computers](#)

Imports: [crude oil/petroleum products](#), [semiconductors](#), [natural gas](#), [coal](#), [steel](#), [computers](#), [wireless communication equipment](#), [automobiles](#), [fine chemical](#), [textiles](#).

#### **Biggest Trading Partners**

Exports: [China](#), [United States](#), [Hong Kong](#), [Vietnam](#), [Japan](#)

Imports: [China](#), [Japan](#), [United States](#), [Germany](#), [Saudi Arabia](#)

More information can be found at:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ks.html>