

South Korea

Official name: Republic of Korea (not to be confused with the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, also known as North Korea)

Type of Government: Unitary presidential democracy

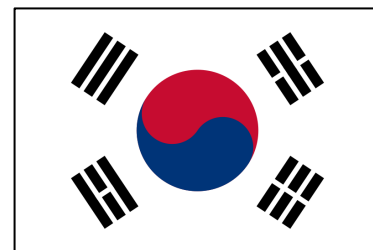
Leader: President Park Geun-hye (term ends 2022)

Capital City: Seoul

Ideology: Capitalist (with strong state intervention), democratic

Region: Asia-Pacific (same as China and Australia)

Neighbours: North Korea, Japan



DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Population:** 49 million.
- **Religion:** Officially secular; 31% Christian, 24% Buddhist.
- **Age:** Extremely low growth rate (0.18%, 177th highest in the world), low net migration (0 per 1000 population), low birthrate. 47% in the 25-54 age bracket but population aging. 83% of population urbanised.
- **Ethnicities:** Homogenous. Korea is famous for being one of the world's more homogenous societies.
- **Language:** Korean.

ECONOMY

- Korea has demonstrated incredible growth; from being at the level of poorer African countries at the end of the Korean War (in the 1960s), it is currently the world's 12th largest economy. Long-term challenges include an aging population, inflexible labor market, and heavy reliance on exports.
- GDP \$1.6 trillion, with GDP per capita of \$31,900. Unemployment only 3.2%, despite recession. Growth slowed from 6.3% in 2010 to 2% in 2012, largely because of reduced demand for exports
- Major industries include electronics, telecommunications, and cars. Industry makes up 39.8% of economy with services making up 57%.

Exports

- With \$552.6bn in exports each year, Korea is the world's 8th largest exporter. Major Export Partners include China (24.4%), US (10.1%), and Japan (7.1%).
- Major exports include: semiconductors, wireless telecommunications equipment, motor vehicles, computers, steel, ships, petrochemicals

Imports

- Import partners include: China 16.5%, Japan 13%, US 8.5%, Saudi Arabia 7.1%, Australia 5%
- Imports include raw materials (which is why Australia is 5%) especially oil and steel.

Natural Resources

- Limited, especially little arable land – relies on imports for food.

MILITARY

Size: 650,000 active troops and 3.2 million reserves; a long history of invasions means Korea allocates 2.7% of GDP (\$29bn USD) to the military. It has the second largest army per capita in the world – after North Korea. There is mandatory military service for all Korean males.

Navy: 68,000 naval personnel, 170 ships. Mostly concentrated near the North Korean border. The US navy provides most of the support for the Korean navy.

Air force: 840 aircraft, mostly American.

US forces: Because of North Korea, the US stations an additional 28,000 troops in South Korea as well as several aircraft carriers. Until 2015, the US (technically the UN) would take command of the South Korean army if North Korea attacked.



POLITICS

Domestic Politics

- While South Korea originally started off as a dictatorship, as its economy grew it became more democratic. Today, it is a fully democratic country structured similarly to the USA with a powerful President (who lives in “the Blue House”) and an independent legislative branch.
- Major domestic political issues relate to expanding social welfare (healthcare, pensions) and “economic democratization”, or the practice in South Korea of concentrating economic power in dominant conglomerates (called “chaebol”), which has led to serious inequalities in Korea.

Foreign Policy Concerns

- The problem of North Korea dominates all South Korean foreign policy. Officially the North and South are still at war, and both have an official policy of forceful reunification of Korea. North Korea is quite militarily capable of launching a nuclear strike on Seoul...and might be crazy enough to try.
- The biggest relationship freezer was the sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan in March 2010, as well as the shelling of Yeonpyeong. There is a permanent and severe risk of escalation.
- Typically South Korea’s policy on North Korea is either a hard line (embraced by the current conservative President) which makes no concessions until it gets rid of its nukes, or a “Sunshine Policy” designed to engage North Korea.
- Because of North Korea, South Korea’s strongest ally by far is the USA; the US provides South Korea with a huge amount of military supplies and the two countries have a free trade agreement. South Korea also gets on well with China (surprisingly), because of close trade links.
- Korea dislikes Japan for historical reasons; they also have territorial disputes on some islands.
- Korea generally supports the UN, international human rights, democracy promotion, humanitarian intervention (where it is practical), and would contribute some resources to peacekeeping.

More Information

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Korea

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

BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15289563>

Latest news from the **New York Times** (<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/southkorea/index.html>),

the **Economist** (<http://www.economist.com/topics/south-korea>),

the **Guardian** (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/south-korea>), and

the **Chosun Ilbo**, a Korean newspaper (<http://english.chosun.com/>).