

## **V.I.P. ARTICLE SUBMITTED BY:**

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### The Korean Electoral System

The Republic of South Korea came into being after World War II, the result of a 1945 agreement reached by the Allies at the Potsdam Conference, making the 38th parallel the boundary between a northern zone of the Korean peninsula to be occupied by the USSR and southern zone to be controlled by U.S. forces. Since the end of the Korean War, the Republic of South Korea has been steadily developing into full-fledged liberal democracy with free and competitive elections in a multiparty system. The first elections were held in 1948 for a national assembly, which adopted a republican constitution and elected Syngman Rhee as the nation's president. The new republic was proclaimed on Aug. 15 and was recognized as the legal government of Korea by the UN on Dec. 12, 1948.

The President is elected by popular vote to serve a single 5-year term, and is considered the head of state. In addition to being the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the president also has considerable executive powers. However, he is also kept in check by the independent judiciary and the members of the National Assembly. The president appoints the prime minister with approval of the National Assembly, as well as appointing and presiding over the State Council of chief ministers.

In the National Assembly (*Kukhoe*), 243 members are elected in single-member constituencies to serve 4-year terms and 56 members are elected by proportional representation to serve 4-year terms. The mixture of single member district voting and proportional representation balances out the tendency towards a two-party majoritarian system, although in most cases, there are two prominent parties that compete to capture the most votes. The major conservative party is the Grand National Party or *Hannara* in Korean, meaning "one nation". The Grand National Party currently enjoys nearly half of the support by the Korean public, ranging from business leaders and affluent youth to the elderly. Its support is low only in the Jeolla province, which has for nearly 50 years supported Kim Dae-jung, a well-known progressive politician born in that province who also served as President of South Korea (1997-2002). Following the 2000 parliamentary elections it was the single largest political party, with 54% of the vote and 147 seats out of 271. The opposing leftist party to the GNP has been the United New Democratic Party (UDP) which ruled under President Roh, and the moderately strong Centrist Reformist Party or the "Millennium Democratic Party".

On national election day, registered voters go to designated ballot boxes in their region and vote on either individual candidates in single member districts, or a party list of candidates in proportional representation districts. Over the years, the election turnouts have shown increasingly competitive trends among many different parties, but South Korea still enjoys a stable government and public participation in the democratic process seems to be gaining a firm foothold with a balance of mass demonstrations and corresponding government measures that reflect the popular opinion.

Sources:

"Elections in South Korea." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 16 Nov 2008, 05:08 UTC. 19 Nov 2008

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Elections\\_in\\_South\\_Korea&oldid=252101450](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Elections_in_South_Korea&oldid=252101450)>.

[http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Politics-of-South-Korea#Executive\\_branch](http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Politics-of-South-Korea#Executive_branch)