



Country Intelligence Brief

South Korea

Overall Risk Rating

2.25 - Low

Table of Contents

Ratings Overview	3
Factbox	4
Overview	5
Security	6
Infrastructure	8
Environment	12
Health and Medical	13
Political	17
LGBTQ Security	23
Active Alerts	25

Ratings Overview

Security

2.25 - Low

Civil Unrest	● 2.50
Crime	● 2.00
Kidnapping	● 1.00
Terrorism	● 1.25
Armed Conflict	● 2.50
Security Services	● 2.00

Infrastructure

1.75 - Low

Ground Transport	● 1.50
Cyber	● 2.50
Maritime	● 2.25
Air Travel	● 1.50
Utilities	● 1.25

Environment

2.50 - Moderate

Man-Made Hazards	● 1.75
Seismic	● 2.25
Storm Systems	● 2.75
Natural Hazards	● 2.25

Health and Medical

2.00 - Low

Disease and Health Threats	● 1.75
Medical Facilities and Services	● 2.25
Mental Health	● 3.25
Food and Water Safety	● 1.00

Political

2.00 - Low

Corruption	● 2.75
Government Stability	● 2.00
Rule of Law	● 2.25
Sanctions	● 1.50

LGBTQ Security

3.00 - Moderate

LGBTQ Legal Environment	● 3.00
LGBTQ Enforcement	● 3.00
LGBTQ Social Environment	● 3.00

FactBox

Location	South Korea
Government Type	Presidential Republic
Population	51,690,479 (2025)
Languages	Official Language: Korean. Other languages that are considered official or widely spoken: Regional Korean dialects are spoken in different areas of the country. Basic English is commonly spoken by workers in the travel and hospitality industry. Languages that should only be used discreetly: None.
International Country Code	+82
Time Zones	UTC+9
Traffic	Drives on the right
Drinking Water	Safe to Drink

Overview

2.25 - Low

Overview

South Korea presents a low-to-moderate security and operational risk for international businesses and travelers, with the primary security concern stemming from North Korea's nuclear, missile, cyber, and military capabilities. Most business and travel activity remains unaffected, but changes in North Korean military activity or US-South Korea relations could produce short-notice disruption.

- **Trend:** The overall security environment is stable, but uncertainty around US-South Korea military cooperation and continued North Korean weapons and cyber activity could increase localized risks.
- **Topline Advice:** Travel to South Korea can proceed with routine precautions, as most business and travel activity remains unaffected by the primary security concern of North Korean military activity. Travelers should allow for possible short-notice airspace or maritime restrictions linked to North Korean missile launches, and organizations should maintain strong cyber hygiene, including scrutiny of remote hires and system access, given North Korean cyber operations targeting businesses.

Current Situation

The main external security risk comes from North Korea, which continues to develop nuclear and missile capabilities and use military activity to pressure Seoul and Washington. North Korea has recently conducted ballistic missile launches and criticized US-South Korea military exercises, but these actions remain consistent with its established pattern of signaling and weapons testing.

The US-South Korea security relationship is undergoing adjustments to military cooperation and readiness. For instance, Washington and Seoul shortened the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield 2026 exercise following a US decision to reduce its military participation. Seoul continues to emphasize the importance of the alliance, and changes to such exercises could affect perceptions of deterrence and military readiness. North Korea has criticized this change as insufficient and it continues to oppose US military cooperation with South Korea and Japan.

Cyber activity presents a more immediate concern for international businesses than conventional military action. North Korean operations increasingly target financial institutions, cryptocurrency platforms, technology companies, and organizations outside the peninsula to generate revenue and obtain technology. North Korean IT workers have reportedly been using false identities to obtain employment and gain access to company systems and information.

Outlook

The main variable will be the scope of changes to US-South Korea military cooperation and North Korea's response to those changes. Further reductions or changes to major exercises could prompt additional missile launches, military activity near the Northern Limit Line, or cyber operations targeting South Korean government and commercial networks. Any renewed US-North Korea engagement could temporarily reduce military tensions, but limited diplomatic progress is unlikely to prevent North Korea from continuing weapons development.

Triggers

- North Korea conducts a missile or rocket launch that prompts temporary airspace or maritime restrictions affecting South Korean airports, coastal areas, or major commercial routes, especially if the launch trajectory or debris creates a direct safety concern.
- North Korea increases artillery, naval, or missile activity near the Northern Limit Line or other disputed areas, creating a sustained risk of an incident involving South Korean forces.
- North Korea resumes nuclear testing or takes a significant step toward a new nuclear weapons capability, prompting expanded US-South Korea military activity or additional security measures.

Security

2.25 - Low

South Korea is generally a safe destination for travelers. Petty opportunistic crime poses a limited threat to visitors in the main urban centers. Protests and strike actions occur fairly regularly, although they mostly result in localized disruptions to traffic and commerce rather than pose a direct threat to the safety of individuals. North Korea remains a latent threat due to its history of provocative rhetoric and actions, along with its nuclear capabilities. Though generally reduced tensions from 2018 raised hopes for better ties between the two Koreas, periods of escalated rhetoric and symbolic threats continue to occur. Transnational extremist groups are not known to have a presence in South Korea, and the country has strong counter-terrorism capabilities in place.

Civil Unrest

2.50

Current Situation

There are sporadic protests in South Korea on various issues. Some of these protests have focused on the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, predominantly denouncing rising tensions and commodity prices, such as fuel and groceries.

Large rallies have occurred over the past year in support of and against former President Yoon Suk-yeol, as he faces insurrection charges for declaring martial law on Dec. 3, 2024. The politician's subsequent impeachment in April 2025 and prison sentence in February 2026 incited anti-Chinese rallies, some of whom claim that the impeachment result was influenced by alleged Chinese interference in South Korean politics.

Triggers

- Rising tensions in the Middle East and with North Korea can spark additional protests.
- Additional court hearings pertaining to Yoon Suk-yeol can cause further protests.

Background

South Korea has an active civil society, and protests occur frequently, especially in urban centers such as Seoul and Busan. Demonstrations are generally staged outside government offices, in public plazas, and along major thoroughfares, and can draw dozens to hundreds of thousands of participants depending on the issue.

In Seoul, popular gathering locations include Gwanghwamun Square, the National Assembly, the Constitutional Court, Seoul City Hall Plaza, and Sungnyemun Gate. Most protests are peaceful and are more likely to result in localized traffic and commercial disruptions than to pose a direct threat to participants' safety. However, some large-scale mobilizations have escalated into violence, especially when protesters are forcibly dispersed.

Episodes of labor unrest occur, though their frequency is generally lower than that of street demonstrations. Large-scale strike actions involving tens of thousands may occur. Strike actions can also be observed alongside rallies, which can escalate into localized violence.

Crime

2.00

South Korea is known to be a safe country.

Most criminal activities are petty and opportunistic in nature, including pickpocketing and purse-snatching, and are mainly concentrated in crowded areas of large cities, such as Seoul and Busan. Hotspots include marketplaces, tourist areas, and transportation hubs. Financial scams and online crime, including data theft and hacking, are also present in the country.

Female travelers have been targets of sexual harassment and assault in nightclubs, as well as in taxis and on trains. Popular nightclubs in major cities like Busan and Seoul are considered among the highest risk areas for sexual assault. Alcohol-related clashes between locals and foreigners are occasionally reported at bars and nightclubs in major cities. Hidden and spy camera crimes have also been reported in toilets, changing rooms, motels, and hotels.

South Korea maintains strict gun control laws, with criminal incidents involving firearms considered to be rare.

Kidnapping

 1.00

The threat of kidnapping in South Korea is minimal; kidnappers are more likely to target locals, though the overall rate of kidnappings in the country is low. The most common types of abduction in South Korea include opportunistic kidnap-for-ransom or kidnappings related to family or business disputes or organized criminal groups, which use kidnapping as a method of collecting unpaid debts or extorting money. Victims could be held for long periods of time without any guarantee of safe release, and could face the threat of injury or death during confinement.

Terrorism

 1.25

No known extremist groups are known to operate in South Korea, nor have there been any attacks perpetrated by transnational terrorist elements in recent decades. The Islamic State (IS) warned in 2015 and 2016 of attacks against South Korea, including US military bases, over its participation in an international coalition against the jihadist organization in the Middle East, but these threats failed to materialize. Moreover, South Korea has a relatively ethnically homogeneous population, and calls for 'lone-wolf' attacks are less likely to resonate as in some countries where members of minority groups seeing themselves as marginalized may be more susceptible to be influenced by radical propaganda.

Moreover, South Korea possesses strong law enforcement and intelligence gathering capabilities. In March 2016, lawmakers passed an even more robust Anti-Terrorism Law, which boosted the National Intelligence Service's (NIS) ability to track and monitor suspects as well as increased punitive measures for individuals convicted on terrorism-related charges. South Korea also maintains bilateral security strategic partnerships with foreign governments, and also regularly carries out counter-terrorism exercises when it is scheduled to host major international events, further boosting its preparedness. In addition, authorities have been quick to act against any perceived threats, deporting several individuals with suspected links to extremist outfits over the past few years.

Armed Conflict

 2.50

South Korea faces a latent conflict threat from its northern neighbor, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea). The two sides remain officially at war since fighting on the Korean Peninsula ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty in 1953. Ties between Seoul and Pyongyang have historically been tense, with low-level skirmishes occasionally erupting along the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which serves as the de facto border that divides the peninsula. The truce, however, has generally withstood belligerent statements and provocations such as missile tests by the North, and military drills by the South and its allies.

Although Pyongyang maintains a large arsenal of short-range ballistic missiles and artillery which are well within range of the South Korean capital Seoul, this provision is largely seen by the Kim regime as an insurance measure and deterrence against potential military intervention by the US and its allies. At this juncture, the likelihood of a large-scale conflict breaking out is considered to be relatively low as this would undermine the immediate strategic aims of both sides and major global powers. Nevertheless, South Korea continues to participate in US-South Korea joint military exercises annually between February and April, and in August. Heightened tensions and an increase in missile tests by North Korea typically occur over the duration of the exercises.

Security Services

2.00

The capabilities and responsiveness of security services in South Korea are generally good (risk is low). The Korea National Police Agency (KNPA) is the primary law enforcement body, and access to assistance is widely available across the country. Although South Korea has several different security forces, the Foreign Affairs Investigation Division, which investigates major crimes involving foreign nationals and houses the KNPA Tourist Police, is the most relevant for foreign nationals. Local staff and resident foreign nationals typically interact with the Public Safety Division, Public Order Division, and the Traffic Safety Division. KNPA Tourist Police officers speak English, Japanese, and Mandarin Chinese. However, a shortage of English interpreters can cause potential problems for foreigners receiving services.

Infrastructure

1.75 - Low

There are no major safety concerns over air travel.

There are no major safety concerns over air travel, however, driving can be somewhat dangerous due to reckless motorists.

The Port of Busan is efficient.

Electricity supply, mobile network coverage, and Internet connections are reliable across the country, with the country having one of the fastest Internet connections in the world.

Cybercrime poses a credible threat due to the high use of, and reliance on, online networks and platforms.

Ground Transport

1.50

South Korea's road network is extensive, covering approximately 104,983km (65,233 miles), the majority of which is paved. Roads and highways, in general, are well-maintained, well-marked, often in both Korean and English, and well-lit. However, many roads are narrow and some are built on a steep incline. Driving can be hazardous due to sometimes aggressive driving habits amongst local motorists. South Korea has one of the highest road fatality rates amongst the 34 OECD members.

There is a developed rail network offering reliable and safe super-express services between Seoul and a number of other destinations including Mokpo, Pusan, Chungju, Yeosu, Incheon, and Onyang. Travelers will find that major stations are marked in English, and English translations of timetables are generally available. In addition to the super-express network, there are lower-level domestic services running extensively throughout the country. Travel within Seoul is facilitated by an excellent underground rail system and bus network, although the city can be very busy and these services can be extremely overcrowded at rush hours. The system is generally safe and efficient.

Local Buses

Unrated

Intercity buses are available between most major cities. Intercity buses in South Korea have an average safety record. Petty theft and other criminal activities pose a moderate threat to travelers. Terrorists have not attacked buses in South Korea in the last decade.

City buses are available in most urban centers. City buses in South Korea have a good safety record. Petty theft and other criminal activities pose a low threat to travelers. Terrorists have not attacked city buses in South Korea in the last decade.

Mass Transit

Unrated

Metro systems are available in most major cities in South Korea. The country's metro systems are generally efficient and safe. Securing personal items onboard metro trains is important, as theft is a standard threat.

Taxis ● Unrated

Taxis are readily available in all major cities in South Korea. Ride-sharing services or vehicles ordered through online apps are available in South Korea.

Train Travel ● Unrated

South Korea has a comprehensive, nationwide rail network with frequent service. Trains generally run on time. Accidents and derailments are rare. Personal safety and property security aboard trains or at train stations is generally good.

Vehicles and Roads ● Unrated

Road safety conditions in South Korea are generally good. Traffic in South Korea drives on the right. Heavy traffic congestion is common in major cities. Car rentals are available in most major cities. Foreigners planning to drive in South Korea must have an International Driving Permit (IDP) or valid driver's license issued within the country.

International Road Travel

South Korea does not have any international road connections.

Cyber ● 2.50

Geostrategic Concerns

The cybersecurity landscape in South Korea presents an overall low level of threat shaped by a balance of threat activity, institutional capacity, as well as digital and infrastructure resilience. However, in 2025, South Korea elevated its cyber threat level from attention to caution - the second lowest tier on a four-tier alert scale. South Korea faces moderate exposure to state-linked cyber espionage, with increasingly regular targeting of government institutions, namely the Ministry of Defense, and critical infrastructure. Broader risks include traditional media and social media content censorship, Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven surveillance with exposure varying according to political alignment.

The legal and regulatory environment in South Korea is robust, with key measures including the Personal Information Protection Act (PIA), the Act on the Promotion of Information and Communications Network Utilization and Information Protection in addition to the Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Act. These laws impose requirements on data protection and collection, reporting of data breaches, and incident response. The effectiveness of these measures is assessed as medium, reflecting robust enforcement and proactive regulatory development. Institutional capacity is provided through a multi-agency structure involving the National Intelligence Service (NIS), the National Security Office (NSO), and the Ministry of Science and ICT (MSIT), ensuring strong coordination between government, private sector, and critical infrastructure providers. Overall, the country's domestic digital infrastructure is resilient, with the strongest protections in mobile security, automotive and manufacturing as well as government critical infrastructure; however, the weakest protections are present in small-to-medium enterprises and sectors.

Cybercrime

South Korea is assessed as a medium threat. Common threats include financially motivated malware, ransomware, and phishing, alongside state-sponsored and corporate espionage. Small-to-medium enterprises and the general public as well as multinational corporations are most vulnerable to compromise. South Korea also experiences supply chain attacks, large-scale data breaches in the public and private sphere as well as a increasing rate of online scams.

Law enforcement capacity is strong, with authorities well-resourced and multi-agency cooperation, in addressing cybercrime. South Korea also experiences a consistent, proactive regulatory environment. Cooperation with international partners is robust. Systemic resilience is dependent on several factors: public-private coordination, institutional resources and development, as well as global partnership.

Maritime

2.25

Port overview

South Korea has major ports along its Yellow Sea, Korea Strait, and East Sea/Sea of Japan coasts. The principal commercial ports are Busan, Incheon, Yeosu-Gwangyang, Ulsan, and Pyeongtaek-Dangjin, with Busan acting as the country's main container and transshipment hub. South Korean ports are secure, with strong state oversight, established port authorities, and ISPS-based port-security controls. They are generally efficient, though temporary congestion can occur due to vessel bunching, peak cargo periods, weather disruption, and labor or transport-sector action. Governance is comparatively strong; corruption is not assessed as a major port-security driver, though customs checks and anti-smuggling inspections can cause administrative delays. Cargo theft and petty crime are not major systemic threats, but smuggling through containers or vessel compartments is present, particularly involving narcotics

Ferries

Ferry travel is available domestically between the mainland, Jeju, and outlying islands, and internationally from Busan to Japan, including Osaka, Fukuoka, Shimonoseki, and Tsushima Island. Ferry travel is generally safe due to South Korea's regulatory capacity. However, accidents remain possible, particularly in narrow coastal channels, during adverse weather, or where crew error occurs.

Maritime threats

Regional tension with North Korea is the primary maritime threat. The Northern Limit Line in the Yellow Sea is disputed, and North Korean vessels occasionally cross or approach the boundary, prompting South Korean warning broadcasts or warning shots. North Korea has also conducted GPS interference affecting vessels and aircraft near western border areas. North Korean missile or rocket activity can also generate short-notice navigation warnings and heightened military monitoring in surrounding waters. These activities can cause navigational uncertainty, delays, rerouting, or heightened naval activity near sensitive waters. Commercial vessels should stay abreast of navigation warnings and avoid operating close to restricted or contested military zones unless required.

South Korea's ports and coastal approaches experience heavy commercial, fishing, ferry, and naval traffic. The approaches to Busan, Incheon, Pyeongtaek-Dangjin, and ports near Jeju can be congested, increasing collision and grounding risk. Vessels engaged in smuggling, illegal fishing, or other illicit activity may not consistently use AIS or may operate unpredictably, creating an additional navigational hazard. In the Korea-China Provisional Measures Zone, Chinese aquaculture and monitoring structures have also created operational friction, though this has mainly affected survey, fishing, and government vessels rather than cargo vessels.

Typhoons, heavy rainfall, flooding, strong winds, storm surge, and rough seas can disrupt port calls, ferry operations, and coastal navigation. Typhoon season normally runs from June to November, while heavy summer rainfall can cause flooding and landslides that affect port hinterland access. Earthquakes are less common but remain a secondary hazard.

Criminality is a low-to-moderate maritime threat. Drug smuggling through ports is present and has increased in profile, with large seizures recorded on vessels docked in South Korea. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is also a persistent issue, particularly involving foreign

fishing vessels in the Yellow Sea, where enforcement action can create localized confrontations. Cargo theft and opportunistic crime are limited compared with many regional ports, but standard cargo integrity checks should be maintained.

Air Travel

 1.50

There are no significant concerns over domestic or international air travel to or from South Korea. The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rates the country's aviation sector as compliant with the safety standards set out by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). None of South Korea's airlines are banned in the UK or EU.

The country's main international airport, Incheon International Airport (ICN), is located approximately 40km (25 miles) from downtown Seoul and serves domestic and international flights. Other international airports in South Korea include Jeju International Airport (CJU), Gimpo International Airport (GMP), and Gimhae International Airport (PUS).

There are some infrastructural concerns for South Korea's airports, particularly the concrete structures housing antennas. In December 2024, a Jeju Air aircraft skidded off the runway at Muan airport and crashed into one of these structures, killing most people on board. The transport ministry plans to alter these structures at seven airports to be made up of breakable materials to avoid another similar accident.

As of March 2025, South Korea's transport ministry has banned passengers on South Korean airlines from keeping lithium power banks or e-cigarettes in aircrafts overhead cabin bins. Passengers may carry up to five 100 watt hour (Wh) portable batteries; batteries over 160 Wh are not allowed to be brought on board. Batteries must be kept in clear plastic bags or wrapped in insulation tape. These measures were implemented in response to smoke and fire threats associated with power banks on planes. Lithium power banks are not permitted to be placed in checked baggage.

Check airline websites for further information on prohibited items prior to flying.

Utilities

 1.25

The entire population has access to electricity, which is mainly imported and sourced from liquefied natural gas (LNG), coal, nuclear, and renewable energy. The country's reliance on fossil fuels has raised concerns about energy security, as evidenced by rising fuel prices during periods of tension in the Middle East. This has prompted the government to diversify its electricity sources and to attempt to grow the domestic renewable energy sector by 2030.

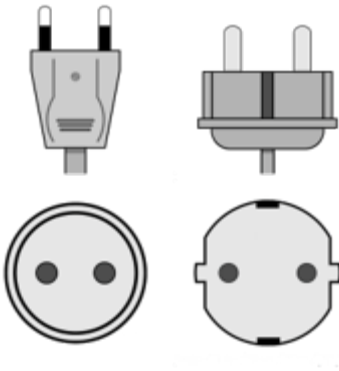
Mobile communications coverage is extensive and highly reliable, with the country's three operators offering an average of 97 percent long-term evolution (LTE) coverage to their subscribers. Internet connections are stable and fast with a high number of Internet users.

Electricity

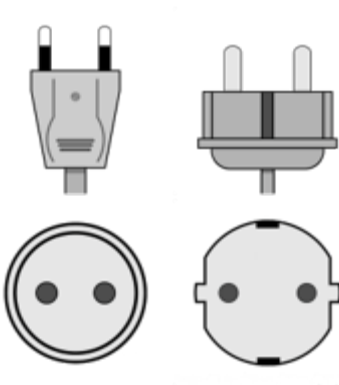
 Unrated

Electricity in South Korea is supplied at 220 V, 60 Hz. South Korea uses Type C and F plugs.

Plug Types



Types de prises



Internet and Telecommunications

● Unrated

Internet service in South Korea is readily available in accommodations and internet cafes. Internet activity is considered private and secure in most areas.

Environment

2.50 - Moderate

South Korea is susceptible to powerful and disruptive storm systems during the typhoon season July-September. Climatic extremes can also occur during the summer and winter periods. The country is not in an active seismic region, and high-intensity tremors are rare. The demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea remains one of the most heavily mined areas in the world.

Man-Made Hazards

● 1.75

The Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea is one of the most heavily mined areas in the world. While the rare casualties incurred in the border region are often military personnel, civilians living near the buffer zone have also been killed or injured. Historically, these civilian casualties were primarily caused by landmines that were accidentally displaced and washed out of the DMZ into farming areas or waterways during severe seasonal flooding and mudslides.

Seismic

● 2.25

The Korean Peninsula, shared by the Republic of Korea (South) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has traditionally been considered safe from powerful earthquakes due to its distance from the highly seismic Pacific Ring of Fire region. Only about a dozen out of more than 2,000 tremors in the past three decades have registered greater than magnitude-5.0.

There are concerns that powerful quakes in neighboring Japan can trigger magnitude-5 and above tremors in South Korea, notably in the vicinity of the Yangsan Fault in the south. Local seismologists have also cautioned that most buildings in the country are at risk of severe damage as they were not built using earthquake-proof designs.

Storm Systems

 2.75

South Korea's typhoon season typically runs July-September, although powerful storm systems can also reach the country outside this period. Storm systems in neighboring Japan can also affect the country's eastern and southern coastal areas May-October. In general, storm systems enter the country from the southern and southeastern coasts, making these areas, which are home to many industrial and port facilities, particularly at risk of experiencing the full brunt of storms or typhoons. South Korea has comprehensive and reliable weather tracking and emergency management systems, although powerful storm systems can overwhelm preparedness and recovery programs.

Tropical Storm Risk (TSR) is predicting above-average activity of around 25 percent in 2026 due to moderate to strong El Nino conditions. In 2026, El Nino conditions are forecast. Storm formation is likely to shift; countries and islands further east and north, including Micronesia, Guam, Japan, Korea, eastern mainland China, and Taiwan, are likely to see a greater number and higher intensity storms.

Forecast Parameter	Average (based on historical activity 1991-2020) Tropical Storm Risk	
Number of Named Storms	25.5	27
Number of Typhoons	16	18
Number of Intense Typhoons	9.3	11

Natural Hazards

 2.25

South Korea has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Temperatures can also vary significantly across seasons, going as high as 35 C (95 F) during summer to as low as -20 C (-4 F) during winter. South Korea has also recorded record-breaking snowfall, drought, and rainfall in recent decades, with authorities blaming these extreme weather episodes on climate change.

Air Quality

 Unrated

Air Quality

Air pollution routinely exceeds recommended thresholds in urban areas. Individuals with asthma or chronic cardiorespiratory conditions should consult with a healthcare provider and carry necessary medications. On days when air quality is particularly poor, affected individuals should take personal precautions to reduce respiratory stress ([map](#)).

Health and Medical

 2.00 - Low

South Korea has several diseases and health threats, including Japanese encephalitis. Vaccines before travel are also required, for example, for yellow fever. Decent-quality private medical facilities can be found in major cities; however, healthcare is lacking in rural locations. Tap water is considered safe for drinking.

Disease and Health Threats

1.75

- **Avian Influenza H5N1:** Transmitted through direct contact with poultry, birds, and bird droppings. Symptoms of human H5N1 are usually severe, including high fever, cough, and shortness of breath. The risk of human infection from avian influenza H5N1 is generally low, but it is greater for individuals with frequent, close contact with wild birds and/or live or recently dead poultry.
- **Chikungunya:** Transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito, mostly during daytime hours. Bite prevention is essential. Symptoms commonly include fever, joint pain, muscle pain, headache, and rash. People usually develop symptoms three to seven days after being bitten. Most people recover within a week, but joint pain can persist for months.
- **Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF):** Transmitted through the bite of an infected tick or through exposure to contaminated blood or tissue from infected animals or humans. Prevention of tick bites is essential. Symptoms appear one to nine days after exposure and include fever, neck pain, eyes sensitive to light, severe headache, nausea, confused or aggressive behavior, abdominal pain, and bleeding into the skin, mouth, and internal organs. There is no vaccination to prevent CCHF infection.
- **Hepatitis A:** Transmitted by contaminated food and water. Hepatitis A does not always cause symptoms. If they occur, symptoms appear two to six weeks after exposure and include fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, fatigue, dark urine, loss of appetite, joint pain, and jaundice. Very low risk in South Korea.
- **Hepatitis B:** Transmitted through infected blood and bodily fluids and effectively prevented with vaccination. An unexpected medical or dental emergency may place the unvaccinated traveler at risk. Practice safe sex and ensure medical procedures, tattoos, or piercings are conducted using sterile equipment. Symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, fatigue, dark urine, loss of appetite, joint pain, and jaundice. Intermediate risk in South Korea.
- **Hepatitis E:** Transmitted by contaminated food and water. Symptoms appear two to eight weeks after exposure and include fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, joint pain, and jaundice.
- **HIV/AIDS:** Transmitted through infected blood and bodily fluids. Practice safe sex and ensure medical procedures, tattoos, or piercings are conducted using sterile equipment. Within two to four weeks of HIV infection, many people, but not all, experience influenza-like illness, including fever, swollen glands, sore throat, rash, fatigue, muscle and joint pains, and headache. These symptoms, also called acute retroviral syndrome (ARS), can last from days to weeks. Without treatment, the infection can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).
- **Japanese Encephalitis:** Transmitted through mosquito bites. Fewer than 1 percent of individuals infected develop symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they usually develop four to 14 days after being infected. Most individuals develop mild, influenza-like symptoms. However, some infections may progress to encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), which can be life-threatening. Risk is greatest for extended time in rural endemic areas and for those involved in agriculture. The risk of infection exists nationwide and is highest from May to November.
- **Leishmaniasis:** Transmitted through the bites of sandflies. Risk is greatest from dusk to dawn. Cutaneous leishmaniasis is the most common form of *Leishmania* infection, causing skin sores that are usually painless. Visceral leishmaniasis is the second most common; typical symptoms include high fever, substantial weight loss, swelling of the spleen and liver, and anemia. If left untreated, this form of leishmaniasis is nearly 100 percent fatal within two years.
- **Malaria:** Transmitted through mosquito bites. Symptoms of malaria most commonly include fever, chills, headaches and body aches, nausea and vomiting, and general malaise. These symptoms usually develop 10-28 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. However, there are reports of symptoms beginning as early as seven days to as late as one year. Preventative medications (prophylaxis) are available. The risk of infection is low and exists in rural areas of Incheon, Gangwon, and Gyeonggi provinces, including the demilitarized zone. The risk of infection is limited to the months of March-December.

- **Rabies:** Transmitted through the saliva of infected wild or domesticated mammals, usually by a bite or scratch. Do not approach unfamiliar animals. Wild and domestic animals pose a threat.
- **Tick-borne Encephalitis (TBE):** Transmitted through the bite of an infected tick. Bite prevention is essential. In rare cases, people can become infected by consuming unpasteurized dairy products. Early symptoms include fever, fatigue, headache, myalgia, and nausea. These symptoms generally appear two to 10 days after exposure. In some cases, infection can progress to encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), which can be life-threatening. Most cases occur from April to November in forests and fields below 1500 meters' altitude (approximately 4,920 feet). The risk of infection likely exists nationwide. Risk is likely year-round.
- **Traveler's Diarrhea:** Transmitted by contaminated food and water. This is the most common illness in travelers. People who become ill by an infectious agent that causes traveler's diarrhea most often experience nausea, vomiting, fever, bloody stools, and/or the urge to constantly pass stools despite an empty gastrointestinal tract. High risk in South Korea.
- **Tuberculosis:** Transmitted through respiratory droplets released by coughing or sneezing. Individuals planning an extended stay should consider obtaining a PPD skin test to reference against future suspected infections. Symptoms commonly include chest pain, a bad cough lasting three weeks or longer, and coughing up blood and/or sputum. Some people also experience chills, weight loss, fever, weakness, night sweats, and loss of appetite. Intermediate risk in South Korea.
- **Typhoid Fever:** Transmitted by contaminated milk, water, and food. Raw fish and shellfish from contaminated waters are likely to be infected. Symptoms of typhoid fever usually include fever, abdominal pain or discomfort, chills and body aches, weakness, and loss of appetite.

Health Requirements

● Unrated

Yellow Fever: Vaccination Required

South Korea is not considered at risk for **yellow fever**. Nevertheless, vaccination is **required** upon arrival for all travelers aged one year and over who have visited or transited for more than 12 hours through an airport in a country with a risk of yellow fever transmission. A single-dose, full-strength yellow fever vaccine is valid for life.

Health Recommendations

● Unrated

Recommended Immunizations for Travel to South Korea

Travelers should ensure that they have routine vaccination courses and boosters. You should visit a healthcare professional at least four to six weeks before the trip. Routine vaccines include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and the annual flu vaccine. Travelers should consider obtaining COVID-19 vaccination where available, even if the destination country does not require it.

- **Hepatitis A:** Recommended for most individuals unless contraindicated. Two doses, administered at least six months apart, are required for long-lasting protection. It is recommended that all susceptible people traveling for any purpose, frequency, or duration to countries with high or intermediate hepatitis A endemicity be vaccinated or receive immune globulin before departure. A booster is recommended for partially vaccinated travelers.
- **Hepatitis B:** Recommended for most individuals unless contraindicated. Widely used formulations require three doses administered over the course of six to 18 months, depending on the recipient's age and vaccination history. Booster doses after a complete series are usually not required to maintain immunity. If exposed before finalizing the full series, individuals may receive a special booster within 24 hours for short-term protection.

- **Japanese Encephalitis:** Unless contraindicated, it is recommended for individuals who are moving to or planning stays of one month or longer in endemic areas, especially in rural areas with rice fields or marshland during the transmission season. It is also recommended for travelers engaging in activities that increase the risk of infection, such as visiting rural areas, hiking or camping, or staying in places without air conditioning, screens, or bed nets. Widely used formulations require two doses administered 28 days apart. An accelerated series may be available, with the first dose required at least two weeks before travel.
- **Rabies:** Unless contraindicated, the WHO and CDC recommend vaccination for individuals who will be performing occupational or recreational activities that increase the risk for exposure to potentially rabid animals, such as animal handlers, field biologists, cavers, missionaries, veterinarians, and some laboratory workers. It is also recommended for travelers who might have difficulty getting prompt access to safe post-exposure prophylaxis. South Korea has reported rabies in domestic and wild animals; thus, most travelers are at risk. Bats are likely to carry bat rabies.
- **Tick-borne Encephalitis:** Recommended for individuals trekking, working, or engaging in outdoor activities in high-risk, endemic areas, particularly heavily forested areas where the disease occurs and ticks are likely to be found. Currently, a tick-borne encephalitis vaccine is available in many countries. The initial vaccine consists of three doses and requires six months or more for completion. Tick bite prevention is also essential.
- **Typhoid Fever:** Recommended for most individuals unless contraindicated, especially those staying with friends or relatives in endemic areas or visiting smaller cities or rural areas. Widely used formulations require between two and four doses, depending on the formulation and the recipient's vaccination history. Booster vaccination is required every two or five years depending on the formulation. The last dose should be taken at least one week before travel.

Medical Facilities and Services

2.25

Medical facilities are of excellent quality, and medical professionals are well-trained. Healthcare facilities, specifically private ones, in the country's major population centers are considered adequate for most needs, including emergencies. Those in smaller towns or more rural areas will find facilities lacking, though they may still be adequate for routine needs in some moderately sized towns. Payment at healthcare facilities is typically done up-front, and patients with international healthcare coverage should apply for reimbursement from their carriers. Ambulance services are readily available.

Medications and Pharmacy

Unrated

Pharmacies across South Korea are readily available. Supply of essential medicines needed by travelers is high. Prior to traveling confirm the status of your "over the counter" medicines with accredited foreign government offices of South Korea in your country. Always carry your prescription medication in its original packaging, along with your doctor's prescription and any other relevant documentation.

Mental Health

3.25

Mental health service availability is limited and conditions are moderately managed.

Food and Water Safety

1.00

Drinking tap water is generally safe. Use only bottled, boiled, or otherwise purified water for drinking and cooking. Do not use ice cubes made from unpurified water sources. Eat only thoroughly cooked food served hot, or fruits and vegetables that you have cleaned and peeled; avoid salads. Consume only pasteurized milk and dairy products, or use powdered or canned milk and cured cheeses. Avoid street vendors and unregulated food establishments.

Political

2.00 - Low

South Korea is a presidential republic with strong democratic institutions. The government has stabilized following the election of President Lee Jae Myung in June, 2025, with his Democratic Party holding a majority in the National Assembly.

This stability comes after a period of political upheaval following President Yoon Suk-yeol's brief declaration of martial law on Dec. 3, 2024, which was swiftly rejected by opposition lawmakers and triggered widespread protests. The martial law decree, likely an attempt to consolidate power amid a fractured political landscape and declining approval ratings, followed months of opposition-led challenges to Yoon's administration. Yoon was impeached on December 14, 2024, and was sentenced to life imprisonment on February 19, 2026.

Lee's government has been viewed as favoring the continuation of South Korea's alliance with the US while also improving ties with China and Japan. Several attempts by Lee's government to engage with North Korea have been rejected by Pyongyang.

Corruption

2.75

Corruption poses a moderate concern in South Korea. Anti-corruption laws have failed to deter corrupt practices in the public and private sector, notably bribery and gift-giving. Several high-profile corruption cases have highlighted systemic issues, especially involving powerful family conglomerates (chaebols) and politicians, such as former presidents Park Geun-hye and Lee Myung-bak. Nepotism and cronyism are also deeply entrenched, with influential chaebols and close business ties shaping economy and governance. Corruption allegations typically garner significant public interest and lead to protests and political rallies in Seoul.

Government Stability

2.00

South Korea has a democratic form of government that operates with three independent branches: executive, legislative, and judiciary. A directly elected president serves as the head of state and leads the executive branch.

The National Assembly is the unicameral legislature that is comprised of 300 elected members. It is currently under the control of the liberal Democratic Party of Korea (DPK), also referred to as the Minjoo Party. The judiciary is independent of the two branches that are tasked with legal adjudication; the Supreme Court is the highest judicial body, and the Constitutional Court.

On Dec. 14, 2024, parliament voted to impeach President Yoon Suk-yeol of the People Power Party after his controversial declaration of martial law on Dec. 3, 2024, alleging anti-state activities by the main opposition DPK. The decree was rejected by lawmakers in a few hours, but prompted large-scale protests calling for Yoon's impeachment.

The Constitutional Court ruled that Yoon's impeachment was legitimate on February 25, 2025. The court's verdict meant that presidential elections were held 60 days after the verdict, with elections occurring on June 3, 2025. The winning presidential candidate was Lee Jae Myung.

Rule of Law

2.25

Rule of law is perceived to be generally enforced in South Korea. However, it is worth noting that the country still faces some challenges. Indeed, several bribery cases that have been filed against members of the judiciary in recent years highlight the susceptibility of judges to corruption. Police have also been accused of turning a blind eye to illegal activities involving key personalities, whilst individuals with close ties with high-ranking officials have allegedly been given special privileges.

Sanctions

 1.50

South Korea is not subject to any international, multilateral, or unilateral economic sanctions.

Legal

Unrated

Visitors to South Korea are subject to local laws, which may not mirror, either in whole or in part, those of their home country. Those deemed to be in violation, even unknowingly, may be fined, detained, imprisoned, temporarily or permanently expelled, or tried *in absentia* depending on the nature of the offense. Home-country consular officers are typically systematically informed of a detention and permitted to provide support services to their detained citizens. When there is no treaty in force, notification and access depend on whether the two countries have direct or indirect diplomatic relations. Consular officers cannot interfere with local judicial proceedings, nor provide legal advice or representation at trial, and are unable to pay legal fees or fines with government funds. The status of dual nationals will be determined by local officials, with all attendant ramifications for access and support.

Emergency Contacts

 Unrated

Emergency Contacts

Ambulance 119

Fire 119

Police 112

Embassies and Consulates

 Unrated

Australian Embassy

Address Australian Embassy in Seoul, Republic of Korea 19th Floor, Kyobo Building, 1 Jongro-1-Ga, Jongro-Gu, KPO Box 562, Seoul 110-714,

Fax +82 2 722 9264 (Consular)

Email seoul-consular@dfat.gov.au

Web Site <http://www.southkorea.embassy.gov.au/seoul/home.html>

Opening Hours Monday to Friday 09:00 - 12:30 and 13:30 - 16:30

Canadian Embassy

Address The Embassy of Canada to the Republic of Korea 16-1 Jeong-dong, Jung-gu, Seoul (100-120), Korea

Fax (011 82 51) 204 5580

Web Site https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/republic_korea-republique_coree/index.aspx?lang=eng

French Embassy

Address Embassy of France in Seoul, Korea (Republic) 30 Hap-dong - Seodaemun-gu, CPO Box 1808 - Seoul 120-030

Fax [82] (2) 31 49 43 10

Email ambafrance@hanafos.com

Web Site <https://kr.ambafrance.org/>

British Embassy

Address Embassy of the United Kingdom in Seoul, South Korea Sejong-daero 19-gil 24 , Jung-gu, Seoul, 100-120 South Korea

Fax (+82) (2) 725 1738

Email Enquiry.Seoul@fco.gov.uk

Web Site <http://www.gov.uk/government/world/south-korea>

Opening Hours Monday-Thursday: 09:00-12:30 / 13:30-17:15 Friday: 09:00-12:30 / 13:30-17:00

German Embassy

Address German Embassy in South Korea Yongsan-Gu, Tongbingo-Dong, 308-5 Seoul

Fax 82 2 748 41 61

Email dboseoul@kornet.net

Web Site <https://seoul.diplo.de/kr-de>

Entry/Exit

Unrated

Inbound foreign visitors - except groups such as government officials or representatives of international organizations - must register biometric information upon arrival. An arrival card is necessary for travelers unless they have obtained Korea Electronic Travel Authorization (K-ETA) or registered with the Korea Immigration Service for a stay over 90 days. Entrants from locations designated as "Quarantine Inspection Required Area" must obtain a [Q-Code](#) online beforehand. Travelers can obtain specific information about visas and other entry-exit requirements at: <https://entry-exit.crisis24horizon.com>.

Pre-Departure

Unrated

- Travelers should have adequate travel insurance in place to enable rapid medical treatment or emergency extraction from South Korea.
- Travelers should provide friends and family with a copy of their travel itinerary, and make a copy of important travel and identification documents.

On Arrival

Unrated

- There are no significant measures that need to be undertaken on arrival into South Korea.

In Transit

Unrated

- Public transport is generally safe, and self driving may be conducted.

At Your Hotel

Unrated

- Relations between South Korea and North Korea remain tense, and the level of tension on the Korean peninsula can change with little notice. Travelers should familiarize themselves with local plans and shelters. Shelters in Seoul are marked with a special symbol. Travelers should further develop a grab-bag containing minimum essentials.
- Local authorities hold occasional civil emergency exercises during which time sirens are sounded and people are asked to take shelter indoors. Participation is not obligatory but travelers should follow any instructions by local authorities during any exercises.
- Travelers can use the American Forces Network (AFN) 360 app to access the AFN radio stations throughout for guidance during a crisis.

In the Street

● Unrated

- Travelers should be aware of the national culture and behavioral expectations. There are no legal restrictions on consensual same-sex relations. While South Korea remains socially conservative with regards to LGBT-related issues, progress has made in terms of advocacy and anti-discrimination efforts based on sexual orientation. Major urban centers such as Seoul have also hosted an increasing number of venues and events catering to the community.
- Travelers should avoid overt displays of wealth and dress discreetly and appropriately to the environment. Do not display money, jewelry or valuables and keep a low profile. In Seoul, Itaewon, Sinchon, Myeongdong, and Hongdae are well-known entertainment and shopping districts in which crowds, alcohol, and a higher prevalence of drug activity present a higher risk for crime.
- Travelers should use only small denominations of the local currency, and keep large amounts of cash and cards in a separate place on your person. Reduce the contents of your wallet or purse contents, particularly cards which may denote affiliations, memberships and accounts. Do not use credit or debit cards unless absolutely necessary and then only at respected, well-known retail and service establishments.
- Travelers should ensure that their mobile phone is carried with sufficient battery life and programmed with appropriate emergency numbers. Travelers should also carry an ID card or passport and emergency medical information.
- Travelers should be aware of their location and surroundings. Avoid high-crime areas and of walking through dimly lit streets after dark. Travelers should know routes and carry a map if necessary, but keep it concealed.
- In crowded situations, travelers should be aware of jostling as this may be a ploy for pick-pockets. Travelers should also be aware of people loitering, and also that attackers may first pass their victim to attack from behind.

Culture

Unrated

Conducting Business - South Korea

Standard Hours of Operation

Business: Monday-Friday, 0900-1700

Government: Monday-Friday, 0900-1800

Banking: Monday-Friday, 0900-1600

Business attire is generally semi-formal. For men, conservative suits are appropriate. For women, conservative dresses or business suits are appropriate. Women should wear flat shoes or shoes with low heels.

Appointments are best scheduled Monday-Friday between 1000-1600. Arriving early to meetings or social engagements is a common practice. Informal or personal discussions are common. Scheduled meetings will typically end on time. If a meeting includes dining out, the guest offers to pay the check, though the host usually pays. Alcohol taken during lunch or dinner meetings is considered appropriate.

English or Korean is commonly used for business purposes. Attempts by visitors to use phrases in the native language are well received but not expected. Business cards are widely used and are presented with both hands. Always use Mr./Ms. or a local honorific/title until the host indicates that using first names is appropriate. Addressing the host according to their official title is seen as a sign of respect. When beginning and ending a business meeting, bow to the other participants before shaking hands.

Gestures

● Unrated

Business cards are widely used and are presented using both hands.

When beginning the meeting, shake hands or bow towards the other people at the meeting. When departing, shake hands or bow again toward the other people.

Use indirect communication and phrasing when speaking with people from South Korea. It is common to make indirect eye contact when speaking to someone at a business meeting.

Avoid using the following gestures or habits, as they are deemed offensive or insulting:

- Pointing at something or someone with one finger.
- Using one hand when giving and receiving something from someone.
- Using red ink.
- Not taking off your shoes when entering a house, office, or place of worship.
- Placing your feet on furniture.
- Placing the thumb between the index and middle finger while clenching a fist.

Religions

● Unrated

Christian 31.6%, Buddhist 24.2%, other or unknown 0.9%, none 43.3%.

Ethnicities

● Unrated

Homogeneous

Significant Dates

● Unrated

2026 Significant Dates

Date	Event
Jan. 1	New Year's Day
Feb. 16-18	Seollal (Lunar New Year)
March 1	Independence Movement Day
March 2	Independence Movement Day Holiday
May 1	Labor Day (Widely observed; not a public holiday)
May 5	Children's Day

May 24	Buddha's Birthday
May 25	Buddha's Birthday Holiday
June 3	Local Election Day
June 6	Memorial Day
Aug. 15	Liberation Day
Aug. 17	Liberation Day Holiday
Sept. 24-26	Chuseok (Harvest Moon Festival)
Oct. 3	National Foundation Day
Oct. 5	National Foundation Day holiday
Oct. 9	Hangeul Day
Dec. 25	Christmas

Financial

Unrated

Financial systems can differ considerably by jurisdiction. Acceptance of cash, debit, and credit cards also varies across the country. Some locations may only accept cash due to the absence of card-processing machines. Banks or legal money changers typically offer the official exchange rates. While the import and export of both local and foreign currency are authorized, sums should not exceed the amount declared upon arrival.

Currency

Unrated

Currency Name/Code

The official currency of South Korea is the South Korean won (KRW). One KRW is made up of 100 jeon. Other currencies are generally not accepted for transactions, but some larger hotels may accept US dollars.

Currency Convertibility

Banks or legal money changers offer the best exchange rates in South Korea. Larger banks may offer the best exchange rates on average. Although black market money-changers may be common in South Korea, they are illegal. South Korea does not forbid foreigners from exiting with local currency in an amounts; but amounts greater than USD 10,000 must be declared.

Credit Card

Unrated

Major credit cards are widely accepted in many urban South Korean businesses. Smaller stores and restaurants outside of cities may charge extra for the use of credit cards.

Taxes and Tipping

Unrated

It is not customary to tip hotel personnel, wait staff in restaurants, or taxi drivers; a service charge of 10 percent may be added to the bill. Tipping is considered an insult and is not expected.

Bank and ATM

Unrated

ATM Availability

Automated teller machines are widely available in Seoul, Busan, and other major cities, but ATM instructions are generally in Korean. Always choose a machine located in a secure area, preferably within hotels or other populated well-lit locations.

Bank Availability

Banking hours are generally Monday through Friday 0900-1700. Cash advances on major credit cards issued by foreign banks are permitted.

LGBTQ Security

3.00 - Moderate

The overall threat environment for the LGBTQ community in South Korea is moderate. Same-sex sexual acts are legal; however, there are no national protections for LGBTQ individuals. Intolerant attitudes persist, and prevailing government and social attitudes are conservative. Furthermore, LGBTQ rights and issues receive little public or political attention.

LGBTQ Legal Environment

● 3.00

The legal environment in South Korea poses a moderate threat. Same-sex sexual acts are legal. There are no laws protecting LGBTQ individuals from discrimination at a national level, though some subnational jurisdictions offer limited discrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In February 2023, the Seoul High Court ruled that revoking the dependent status of a same-sex couple was discriminatory and that the National Health Insurance Service (NHIS) should extend to same-sex couples benefits available to heterosexual couples. This came after the NHIS denied an individual spousal benefits after an alleged clerical error initially allowed him to be listed as a dependent on his partner's health insurance. This ruling was the first time a South Korean court recognized social benefits for same-sex couples. This ruling was upheld on July 18, 2024, as the court declared that failing to recognize a same-sex couple on national health insurance was discrimination based on sexual orientation. In April 2023, the Life Partnership Bill was proposed to the National Assembly and seeks to legalize same-sex unions. However, as of early 2025 the bill is still under review, and same-sex marriage and other forms of civil partnership remain illegal. Transgender individuals are legally permitted to change gender after a court ruling, although the requirements are left up to the discretion of the ruling court. The military prohibits transgender individuals from joining, despite mandatory military service for all able-bodied men aged 18-28. While same-sex sexual acts between civilians are legal, Article 92-6 of the Military Criminal Act prohibits anal intercourse and "any other indecent acts" between military personnel and carries a prison sentence of up to two years. On April 21, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of two men prosecuted under the act for engaging in consensual same-sex sexual acts in a private residence while they were off-duty, stating that the prosecution of the soldiers under the act "jeopardizes the autonomy, equality, and dignity of soldiers." The Constitutional Court reviewed Article 92-6 in October 2023 and upheld the law, declaring it constitutional. This marked the fourth time since 2002 that the court reviewed and upheld the law.

LGBTQ Enforcement

● 3.00

The enforcement of LGBTQ-related laws in South Korea is inconsistent and poses a moderate threat to the LGBTQ community. Statistics regarding cases of discrimination and harassment against LGBTQ individuals in South Korea are inaccurate due to the high level of intolerance in the country and the fear of discrimination, leading to widespread underreporting of incidents. Victims of discrimination, harassment, or attacks are typically hesitant to report incidents out of fear of disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2020, a transgender soldier, Byun Hui-su, committed suicide after a military court discharged her from active service. Following her death, a court ruled that the military court had unlawfully discriminated against Byun Hui-su following her gender-affirmation surgery. The military court had ruled that her loss of male genitalia was a mental or physical handicap that made her ineligible to carry out military service.

LGBTQ Social Environment

● 3.00

The social environment in South Korea poses a moderate threat to the LGBTQ community. Social acceptance of the LGBTQ community is mixed and typically varies across generations, with opposition rooted in conservative values and the Christian faith. LGBTQ rights have

received staunch backlash from organized anti-LGBTQ Evangelical groups. In October 2024, officials claimed that over 200,000 people gathered in Seoul to protest LGBTQ rights and the legalization of same-sex marriage. This gathering was described as “one of the largest religious gatherings in the country’s history” and was said to be in protest of the legal battle won in July of that year, which granted some rights to same-sex couples. According to a 2021 Institut Public de Sondage d’Opinion Secteur (IPSOS) survey, 36 percent of South Korean participants answered that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry legally, 18 percent responded that same-sex couples should be granted some form of legal recognition (but not marriage), and 26 percent answered that same-sex couples should not be granted marriage rights or any other legal recognition. However, younger generations in South Korea are generally more accepting of the LGBTQ community. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center survey, 79 percent of 18 to 29-year-old respondents said same-sex relationships should be accepted by society, in comparison to 23 percent of those 50 and older. Incidents targeting LGBTQ individuals reportedly occur, though it is unclear how frequently, as South Korea does not track anti-LGBTQ incidents as hate crimes. In May 2022, an openly gay K-pop star, Holland, reported a targeted crime in Seoul’s Itaewon area. In the incident, the singer said that a stranger physically and verbally assaulted him. Seoul’s first pride parade took place in 2000, with only a few dozen people, and has grown substantially every year since then. However, in 2023, a Christian group sought municipal approval for permits to host a Christian youth concert in the same area typically reserved for the pride parade. Local authorities agreed to give the Christian group the permits instead of the pride parade organizers, concluding that the youth concert was more family-friendly. In 2024, the parade was once again denied permits due to a similar scheduling conflict. Nonetheless, over 150,000 people marched in support despite not having local authority to do so. Politicians often cite Evangelical groups as their reasoning for not supporting or rescinding their support for LGBTQ rights, likely due to aggressive lobbying by conservative Christian groups. As such, some of South Korea’s most prominent political figures openly promote conservative values. This includes Seoul’s mayor, Oh Se-hoon, who publicly denounced same-sex marriage, and now impeached President Yoon Suk-Yeol of the conservative People Power Party, who altered the national school curriculum to remove the phrases “gender equality” and “sexual minorities.” Ahn Chang-Ho, a former judge elected in 2024 to lead the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK), has faced criticism for his anti-LGBTQ views, as he has stated that “homosexuality is a tool used by communists to incite revolution.” Ahn was elected to lead the NHRCK despite his nomination being heavily opposed by politicians who claimed his views were fundamentalist, far right, and discriminatory.

Active Alerts

No Alerts

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