

## **CHANGE OF PRESIDENTIAL REGIME IN SOUTH KOREA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Mar 2022, South Korea elected its new President Yoon Suk-yeol of the conservative People Power Party (PPP). Yoon won by a very slim margin by edging out Lee Jae-Myung. This year's results were the closest in the country's democratic history, with the final vote count separated by less than 1%. Yoon is a newcomer to politics, having spent most of his career as a public prosecutor.

### **BACKGROUND**

The 2022 Presidential Elections in South Korea was set at the backdrop discontent over economic policy, scandals and gender wars. The elections had a high turn-out of voters, with about 77% of eligible voters who casted their votes. The election campaigns focused more on personal verbal attacks, rather than criticisms on policies and plans. During the campaigning, Yoon has praised former president Chun Doo-hwan, a military dictator who was known for the brutal treatment on pro-democracy protesters then. This has raised concerns among various sections of people. During the campaigning, Yoon had committed to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and blamed the rise of feminism and criticised women for being vocal about the country's low birth rate.

### **THE ROAD AHEAD FOR YOON**

Domestically in South Korea, there was a deep desire to see political change. Yoon has both the opportunity and challenge to reform the presidency in South Korea. President-elect Yoon will need to address the country's widening political fault lines. Yoon has vowed to investigate the alleged wrong-doings of the previous Moon administration, which had drawn great public attention and has raised alarms within Moon's party. The stigmatisation of calls for greater emphasis on women's rights by Yoon's campaign has been popular with his young men voter base. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Unification could see major changes under the South Korean Presidential-elect Yoon Suk-yeol administration. The Foreign Ministry may regain trade functions from the Industry Ministry with growing importance on economic security. The election process occurred at a time the country has been facing one of its worst waves of the coronavirus pandemic, pushed by the Omicron variant. Yoon has pledged to establish a presidential committee dedicated to Covid-19 compensation immediately after his inauguration, and has promised to introduce new laws and revise related regulations.

### **DIRECTION OF FOREIGN POLICY UNDER YOON**


Yoon's foreign policy emphasizes closer alignment with the United States through a "comprehensive strategic alliance." He has advocated that his priority will be the visit to United States after assuming office on 10 May. Unlike President Moon, Yoon supports harsh sanctions on North Korea, in par with the US foreign policy. Yoon has also advocated for the development of military technology that would be capable to counter strikes from the North Korean side. Yoon had criticised Moon Jae-in's policies towards North Korea as a "complete failure". Yoon has proposed that South Korea should support and cooperate with the Quad security alliance between US, Australia, India and Japan. Yoon has even vowed to build a bilateral relationship with China based on mutual respect. But Beijing is likely to object to Seoul's conservative tilt towards Washington, as well as Yoon's interest in securing batteries to expand the coverage of a U.S.-installed anti-ballistic missile defence system. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida congratulated Yoon and stated to work together for improving Japan-South Korea ties. The Japan-South Korea relationship became stalled after the administration of President Moon Jae-in effectively abandoned a bilateral agreement under which the two countries confirmed the settlement of the issue of former comfort women.

### **ASSESSMENT**

- President Yoon's victory in the elections election marks a stunning turnaround for the main conservative bloc, now known as the People Power Party.
- Yoon faces the challenge of uniting a country of 52 million driven by gender and generational divisions, growing inequality and surging home prices.
- The new president of South Korea will likely face an almost immediate crisis with Pyongyang, which appears to be preparing to launch a spy satellite.
- Yoon's pledging to boost bilateral ties with United States of America will create more transition of power dynamics in the Asia Pacific region.
- Yoon's victory will also increase the country's attention and emphasis to the strengthening of military and defense sector.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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