



GR Korea

2024 22nd General Election

February 2024

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The 22nd General Election scheduled for 10 April 2024 is drawing closer.

The General Election – a regular election held every four years to select the 300 members of the National Assembly (NA) – is a significant political milestone in Korea second only to the presidential elections.

The NA operates on a four-year term basis and is one of the three primary branches of the Korean government, which operates on a separation of powers principle to balance out and limit the power of each branch. Serving as the central legislative branch, the NA is authorized by the constitution to monitor and supervise the executive branch. Furthermore, it can not be dissolved by the president, nor is it held responsible for the presidential cabinet.

Key considerations regarding the 22nd General Election are as follows:

General Election status and timeline

The result of the upcoming 22nd General Election can be considered an interim assessment of the incumbent Yoon administration, which will enter its third year (out of five) in May 2024. This election will either establish a foundation for stable national governance in the latter half or will strengthen the opposition party's restraining influence on the ruling party's policy initiatives. (currently, the People Power Party holds 113 seats vs. the Democratic Party's 164 seats).

Thus, the election outcome will be key to determining the future political landscape that will impact the government policy-making, legislative processes, and budget execution.



As of mid-February, with just over two months left until the election, each party is accelerating its election campaigns for nominations and competition for talent recruitment.

Currently, the two major parties, the People Power Party (PPP, the incumbent ruling party) and the Democratic Party (DP, the main opposition party and the majority party in the NA), are conducting interviews and polls on registered candidates for nominations, and most candidates are expected to enter the primary election starting from late February to early March. Nomination status of candidates from the New Reform Party, which was launched on 9 February, is yet to be decided.

The National Election Commission will open candidate registration from 21 to 22 March. Following candidacy registration, the official campaign period will begin on 28 March, 13 days before the election, and extend until 9 April, the day before the election. Although election day is on 10 April, overseas voting and early voting will take place from 27 March to 1 April, and from 5 April to 6 April, respectively. Hence, each party will be keenly focused not only on the election itself but also early voter turnout.



The most significant issue leading up to the upcoming election has been **whether the electoral system, which is directly linked to the allocation of proportional seats, would be reformed.** The current Korean legislative election system¹⁾ combines the single-member constituency elections (253 constituency seats) and the nationwide-constituency proportional representation member elections (47 proportional seats), referring to its distinctive method of allocating proportional seats as the ‘semi-mixed-member proportional electoral system’^{2).}

Election system reform discourse

- 1) General elections in Korea combine both single-member constituency elections (253 constituency seats) and nationwide-constituency proportional representation member elections (47 proportional seats). Voters mark their ballots for both the district candidate and the proportional representation party, placing them in separate ballot boxes.
- 2) The 47 proportional seats are tied to the percentage of voters' support for political parties. However, parties that did not win any constituency seats are prioritized in proportional electoral system to supplement their representation. This election system was introduced ahead of the 21st General Election in 2020 in response to criticism that the two major parties were over-represented in both district and proportional seats.

The current electoral system, introduced ahead of the 21st General Election in 2020, initially aimed to prevent the over-representation of both constituency and proportional seats by the two major parties, ultimately to ensure fair representation of minor parties within the NA. Despite the intent, **criticism has arisen that major parties abused the current system by creating the so-called 'satellite parties' to only nominate list members over electorate members**, thereby securing additional proportional seats³.

Although discussions to address these issues by amending the election law continued until recently, no consensus has been reached. Thus, the 22nd General Election will be conducted under the current system.

As a result, the existing major parties are preparing to launch respective satellite parties to secure as many proportional seats as possible, mirroring the strategy they employed in the 21st General Election. According to announcements from the leadership of both parties, the PPP plans to establish an independent proportional representative party, while the DP is likely to create a new pan-opposition proportional representative party.

The allocation of the 47 proportional seats could be a factor in determining the majority party or could lead to a tripartite structure within the next 22nd NA where a third party holds the deciding vote, should that third party emerge strong.

3) The results of the 21st General Election showed that out of 47 proportional seats, the Future Korea Party (the satellite party of what is now PPP but was then the United Future Party) won 19 seats and the Citizens' Party (the satellite party of DP) won 17 seats, collectively taking 36 seats in total. The remaining 11 seats were taken by the Justice Party (5 seats), the People's Party (3 seats), and the Open Democratic Party (3 seats).

Refer to the table below for further information.

Party	Notes	Seats
Future Korea Party	Satellite party of the United Future Party / PPP	19
Citizen's Party	Satellite party of DP	17
Justice Party	N/A	5
People's Party	Merged with PPP on April 2022	3
Open Democratic Party	Merged with DP on January 2022	3

Emergence of a third party



Source: Yonhap News Agency

A key aspect to monitor in terms of power dynamics is the emergence of a **'the third zone.'**

On 10 January, three senior NA members from the DP – Kim Jong-min, Lee Won-wook, Cho Eung-cheon – defected from the party. Later, on 11 January, Lee Nak-yeon, the former DP chairperson and former Prime Minister, followed.

From the ruling PPP, former chairperson Lee Jun-seok and his supporters defected on 17 December last year.

Advocating for a change to the two-party system, the defectors from both the conservative and liberal parties began to discuss about creating a coalition. As a result, on 9 February, they unexpectedly and surprisingly agreed on a merger of the four parties, thereby establishing **the New Reform Party.**

With **mixed assessments on the New Reform Party's potential influence, the scale of additional defections from major parties and shifting party affiliations, depending on the nomination results of the PPP and the DP, will be a noteworthy development to follow moving forward.**

Starting from mid-January, both the PPP and DP have been sequentially announcing their election pledges, and this is expected to continue until the end of February.

The PPP announced plans to develop General Election pledges focusing on resolving socioeconomic disparity and political reforms. Meanwhile, the DP's Policy Committee is still developing its General Election pledges.

Both parties are competing for votes with a number of similar pledges, such as addressing the low birth rates (the first pledge of both parties), supporting welfare programs for the elderly, incorporating nursing fees as a benefit category into the national health insurance system, and plans to move existing public transport railways fully underground.

However, the **parties are also attempting to differentiate themselves from each other with pledges that diverge according to their respective political ideologies.**

The following page illustrates the main pledges announced by the two major parties as of mid-February.

Major parties' election pledges



Category	People Power Party (PPP)	Democratic Party (DP)
Low birthrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childbirth and childcare support • Corporate culture improvement • Pre- and elementary school childcare policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childbirth, childcare and parenting support • Corporate culture improvement • Elementary childcare policy
Elderly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursing care • Caregiving support • Senior job creation • Free lunch at the community center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of free weekday lunch at the community center
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for independence of self-reliant youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of public housing • Transportation cost support
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving existing public transport railways fully underground • Metropolitan express train • Old downtown revitalization • Creation of cultural/sports space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving existing public transport railways fully underground
Economic revitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support for low-income individuals • Financial support and tax relaxation for small business owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support and interest relief for small business owners and self-employed individuals • Support for small business closure and reopening • Enactment of the <i>Online Platform Act</i> • Establishment of a fair contract system for delivery platforms
Regional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for SMEs' relocation to regional areas • Support for foreign workers in regional areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of balanced development with private sector participation
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening regional-level medical capabilities • Significant expansion of mobile smart hospitals, digital healthcare, and remote healthcare services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of the national health insurance coverage to nursing hospital caregiver expenses
Special pledges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare and work environment improvement for firefighters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare improvement for soldiers

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