

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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South Korea: The Parliamentary Elections [redacted]

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Summary

National Assembly elections on 12 February will be the sharpest test of public support for President Chun since he came to power in 1980. The mechanics of the election guarantee that the ruling party will retain its parliamentary majority, but the government's share of the popular vote probably will decline. A newly organized opposition party -- the New Korea Democratic Party -- running on an anti-Chun platform has challenged the established opposition, contributing to unusually vigorous and confrontational campaigning. Concern about Seoul's international image will prevent Chun from taking tough postelection measures to control what will be a feistier opposition, but Chun probably will be less willing to move forward on political reform. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Korea Branch, Northeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, Korea Branch [redacted]

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The Mathematics of the Election

South Korea's election virtually ensures the Democratic Justice Party (DJP) of President Chun Doo Hwan a comfortable majority in the 276-member National Assembly. Two-thirds of the legislature -- 184 seats -- is directly elected and will be filled by the top two vote-getters in each of 92 election districts. The remaining 92 seats are awarded by a formula that gives 61 seats to the party winning the largest number of elective seats and divides the remaining 31 seats among other parties that win at least five elective seats. [redacted]

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Such election mechanics give the DJP an overwhelming advantage. With the unofficial help of the government bureaucracy and plentiful campaign funds, the DJP can count on winning a seat in nearly every district. Competition among several opposition parties and the independent candidates assures the DJP an overall first place finish plus the 61 appointive seats that go to the victor. In the parliamentary elections of 1981 -- the first test of the present system -- the DJP won 90 elective seats even though it obtained only 36 percent of the popular vote. [redacted]

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Composition of the Current National Assembly [redacted]

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	<u>Ruling Party</u>	<u>Opposition Parties</u>		
	<u>-DJP-</u>	<u>-DKP-</u>	<u>-KNP-</u>	<u>-Others-</u>
Total Seats*	152	81	25	16
(percent)	(55)	(29)	(9)	(6)
Elective Seats*	91	58	18	16
-- urban areas	(39)	(30)	(3)	(6)
-- rural areas	(52)	(28)	(15)	(10)
Appointive Seats	61	24	7	--
Percent of Vote (1981)	35.6	21.6	13.4	29.4

*Includes shift of one independent to the DJP, the shift of one independent to the DKP, and the resignation of one DKP member.

We believe the DJP will win about 85 elective seats this time. [redacted]

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[redacted] The DJP needs only 78 elective seats to retain its parliamentary majority. [redacted]

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Three major and several minor opposition parties and independents are fielding some 350 candidates. While trying to bump DJP candidates into second place in many electoral districts, they are also engaged in a struggle for control of the opposition camp. The two leading opposition parties -- the Democratic Korea Party (DKP) and the Korea National Party (KNP) -- are being challenged by the recently organized New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP). [redacted]

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The NKDP, a tenuous coalition of staunch Chun foes, independents, and disaffected DKP members, includes supporters of longtime rival opposition leaders, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. The party has gained surprising momentum since its organization last December. Despite this late start and a serious shortage of funds, the NKDP appears certain to supplant the KNP as the second opposition party as well as cut into the DKP's strength, especially in urban areas. The NKDP also will probably win many of the seats now held by independents and minor parties. Although [redacted] one-fourth of the races are too close to call, we estimate that the KNP may win 10 to 15 seats, and the NKDP 30 to 40 seats. [redacted]

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The Tone of the Election

With its parliamentary majority in little danger, the ruling party has focused on broader objectives in crafting its election strategy. These include:

- Trying to increase the party's overall share of the popular vote to a demonstrate popular support for President Chun.
- Ensuring that the DKP remains the major opposition party.
- Electing ruling party members who will respond to tightened ruling party discipline under Chun's lieutenants. [redacted]

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The Realities

The unexpected vigor shown by the NKDP will probably make it difficult for the DJP to win even the 36 percent share of the popular vote it received four years ago. In an apparent effort to boost the figures, Seoul has heightened efforts to mobilize the DJP's million-plus rank and file, the security services, and the government bureaucracy behind the campaign. [redacted]

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After four years of tight government controls, the established opposition parties -- the DKP and KNP -- are widely seen as mild-mannered, government-manipulated entities that have accomplished little. Their political stature was further damaged when:

- Most of the political heavyweights who had been previously banned by Chun regained their political rights last November and decided to join the newly organized NKDP or sit out the election.
- More than a dozen important members, including incumbent assemblymen, defected from the KDP to the NKDP. [redacted]

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Only heavy-handed intervention by the security services prevented further defections, according to embassy officials. The DKP's slate consists chiefly of career politicians and middle-scale businessmen who lack the economic campaign resource or respected professional backgrounds of their DJP opponents -- as well as the proven anti-Chun credentials of their NKDP competitors. [redacted]

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The Election as a Challenge to Chun

The two-month-old NKDP has capitalized on the desire of many Koreans for a more combative alternative to established opposition, and with no issue or constituency uniquely their own, both the DKP and KNP candidates also have resorted to campaigning on an anti-Chun platform. This has helped make the election both a fiercer competition for seats and a freer debate on the issue of Chun's rule. NKDP rallies have drawn highly enthusiastic crowds, with speakers vigorously denouncing the legitimacy and credibility of the Chun government and demanding the "end of military dictatorship" and "the restoration of democracy". [redacted]

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Student demonstrations and dissident efforts to challenge the legitimacy of the elections, as well as to support the NKDP's challenge to Chun have heightened preelection tensions. They also have increased the potential that in some areas clashes between police and protestors might disrupt the balloting. [redacted]

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The return of Kim Dae Jung from the United States only days before the voting boosts the tension. Although Chun's advisers have persuaded him that the domestic and international costs of sending Kim back to prison are unexpectedly high, Seoul opposes letting Kim play an active role in politics. [redacted]

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Ensuring Against a Symbolic "Defeat"

Although the government has never believed it would win a share of the popular vote much above that of 1981, we believe the prospect of slipping a few points has been a shock. Boosted by a strong economy, a string of diplomatic successes, and an enhanced

image resulting from a somewhat modified approach to handling student dissent, Chun in mid-1984 was optimistic that the election would reflect public acknowledgment of his achievements. [redacted]

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That mood of optimism has dissipated, however, following setbacks on the campuses, the formation of the NKDP, and the return of Kim Dae Jung. The government reaction to the prospect of a poor showing and the resulting headaches from a more aggressive opposition, has included attempts to manipulate the election by harassing the competition. [redacted]

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The government has tried, for example, to impede the NKDP from renting office space and meeting sites, and has virtually embargoed reporting on NKDP activities by the broadcast media. Opposition candidates also have complained to US officials about illegal censorship of their campaign posters by the Election Management Committee. These activities notwithstanding, independently owned newspapers have been permitted to report opposition party news, as well as to carry editorials favorable to the NKDP -- albeit under a formula that allocates three times more space to ruling party activities than to all of the opposition. [redacted]

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The Postelection Mood

In failing to offer a myriad of campaign regulations that could be used to strait-jacket or even disqualify the most influential opposition candidates, Seoul has paid attention, we believe, to the need to underwrite what most South Koreans will view as an acceptably fair election. Concern about South Korea's international stature and the desire, in particular, to keep Chun's scheduled trip to Washington in April on track will probably inhibit Seoul from taking tougher measures to prevent the emergence of a more combative opposition line-up. Chun and his political advisers want to avoid a blemished election that would add fuel to expected antigovernment demonstrations when the universities reopen late this month. Still, the support of NKDP candidates by student demonstrators could open the door for later accusations that the opposition actively fomented political unrest. [redacted]

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In the face of evidence of his widespread unpopularity, however, we believe that Chun will probably be less confident over prospects for managing the political scene, will retreat farther behind the protective shield of conservative advisers, and become less willing to venture long-promised political reform measures. In dealing with international affairs also, such as pending talks with the North Koreans, Chun will probably be less inclined to risk taking any positions that he believes might further undermine his domestic position. [redacted]

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