

# [***Why did Yoon's party lose in South Korea's elections and what troubles does he face now?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BSC-CJW1-JC5B-G4FJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean voters have handed liberals extended opposition control of parliament in what looks like a massive political setback to conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Some experts say the results of Wednesday’s [*parliamentary elections*](https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-parliamentary-election-yoon-c362a024e6eff3d4a410927be00b4d0c) make Yoon “a lame duck” — or even “a dead duck” — for his remaining three years in office. Others disagree, saying Yoon still has many policy levers and could aggressively push his foreign policy agenda.

But it’s certain that the election outcome poses the toughest political challenge to Yoon since the former top prosecutor took office in 2022 for a single five-year term.

Here is a look at what the election results mean to Yoon and South Korean ***politics***.

**HOW DAMAGED IS YOON POLITICALLY?**

Even before Yoon's inauguration, South Korea's single-chamber National Assembly was controlled by the liberal Democratic Party. Squabbling with Yoon over a range of issues, Democratic Party lawmakers have frequently limited his domestic agenda.

Yoon badly needed his party to regain a parliamentary majority so they could support his agenda. But his People Power Party and its satellite party only won 108 seats in the 300-member parliament, while the Democratic Party and two other liberal parties took a combined 187 seats.

The incoming parliament has a four-year term, meaning its liberal control will likely continue until after Yoon leaves office in 2027. Yoon's hold on the ruling party could be subsequently weakened because many members' loyalty to the president was largely based on their hopes to get party tickets to run for elections.

“He'd be more like a dead duck, rather than a lame duck,” said Park Sung-min, president of Seoul-based MIN Consulting, a political consulting firm. “In the past two years, he was able to control the ruling party as there were elections coming. But the elections are over now, and he's in a considerably difficult situation.”

Hong Sung Gul, a public administration professor at Seoul’s Kookmin University, said Yoon will likely face increasing Democratic Party-led opposition against his push for business-friendly policies, tax reforms and other major policies that require legislative endorsement.

Yoon's prime minister and senior presidential advisers [*offered to resign*](https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-yoon-parliament-election-8a538a2c99146aa6e2279d13b6a6ea3c) en masse on Thursday in an apparent effort to restore public confidence in the government. Hong said Yoon may need to reshuffle Cabinet members as well.

**WHY DID YOON'S PARTY LOSE THE ELECTIONS?**

The elections were widely viewed as a mid-term litmus test of Yoon's government. So he's being chiefly blamed for the election debacle.

Since becoming president, Yoon has struggled with low approval ratings — hovering between 30% and 40%. Critics accuse him of mismanaging economic issues like [*rising prices;*](https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-parliamentary-elections-8ac15e82dacaff19f3c54197fe6d9b9b) failing to seek cooperation with opposition leaders over policy priorities; and filling key posts with former prosecutors and associates, while refusing to replace some of those who were involved in scandals.

Also hurting his popularity were scandals involving his wife and first lady Kim Keon Hee. Spy camera footage was released that purportedly showed her accepting a luxury bag as a gift from a pastor.

Earlier this year, Yoon's approval ratings briefly rose thanks to public support over his high-stakes push to drastically [*increase the number of medical students*](https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-doctors-walkouts-patients-explained-326632dd061fc3b004b663cc761f9016), a step that his predecessors failed to achieve. But thousands of incumbent doctors have gone on strike in protest of Yoon's plan, leaving him with growing calls to seek a compromise.

“Yoon has carried out some reform steps. But his style is tough and he is pushing things forward so hard. But what matters is our people won't tolerate leaders being seen as arrogant,” Hong said.

**IS YOON'S FOREIGN POLICY INTACT?**

Despite the election defeat, Yoon's major foreign policies remain unchanged, as they usually don't need parliamentary approval.

“Yoon will likely accelerate his foreign policies, like on North Korea, strengthening the alliance with the U.S., improving relations with Japan and contributing more to global issues because of his own conviction and style,” said Duyeon Kim, a senior analyst at the Washington-based Center for a New American Security. “He may even pursue bolder foreign policies.”

Kim said a potential challenge in implementing such policies is “whether the bureaucrats will implement them with the same fervor as they have been," especially if parliament cuts budgets or if bureaucrats feel that the domestic political environment is unstable until 2027, when South Korea holds an election to choose Yoon's successor.

Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said that Yoon is not a lame duck “because his administration still has many policy levers and is likely to maintain its approach to international relations.”

“Pyongyang has little reason to comment directly on election outcomes but could intensify efforts at sowing divisions in South Korean society,” Easley said.

**WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR OTHER POLITICAL LEADERS?**

The election results boosted the political standing of Lee Jae-myung, the Democratic Party chairman who lost the hotly contested [*2022 presidential election*](https://apnews.com/article/business-elections-voting-campaigns-seoul-f29dd8982b18c1f7318d579b9afc83f1) to Yoon. Lee is one of the early favorites to run in 2027, along with Han Dong-hoon, a Yoon ally who directed the ruling party's campaign.

Also in the media spotlight is [*Cho Kuk,*](https://apnews.com/general-news-7a1036973ac64c84a149e94f5dc5c304) a disgraced liberal former justice minister whose newly launched small party won 12 seats. Observers say Cho is a potential liberal challenger to Lee.

But both Lee and Cho face legal issues. Lee is under a slew of corruption investigations that he says were politically orchestrated by the Yoon government. Cho could also go to jail if the Supreme Court upholds lower court rulings that sentenced him to two years in prison on various charges, including abuse of power and faking credentials to help his children get into prestigious schools.

The election results dealt a blow to Han. But much of the criticism is against Yoon, while Han, a former justice minister and political novice, built a strong political fanbase during the election campaign. If both Lee and Cho survive their legal troubles and vie for presidency, they could split the liberal vote, helping conservatives.

“Han isn't still free from the defeat,” said Cho Jinman, a professor at Seoul’s Duksung Women’s University. “The conservatives have to seek changes so they may look for a new face to run for the next presidency too."

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