



Korea, North



Background The first recorded kingdom (Choson) on the Korean Peninsula dates from approximately 2300 B.C. Over the subsequent centuries, three main kingdoms -- Koguryo, Paekche, and Silla -- were established on the Peninsula. By the 5th century A.D., Koguryo emerged as the most powerful, with control over much of the Peninsula and part of Manchuria (modern-day northeast China). However, Silla allied with the Chinese to create the first unified Korean state in 688. Following the collapse of Silla in the 9th century, Korea was unified under the Koryo (Goryeo; 918-1392) and the Chosen (Joseon; 1392-1910) dynasties. Korea became the object of intense imperialistic rivalry among the Chinese (its traditional benefactor), Japanese, and Russian empires in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. After the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), Korea was occupied by Imperial Japan. In 1910, Japan formally annexed the entire peninsula. After World War II, the northern half came under Soviet-sponsored communist control.

In 1948, North Korea (formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK) was founded under President KIM II Sung, who consolidated power and cemented autocratic one-party rule under the Korean Worker's Party (KWP). North Korea failed to conquer UN-backed South Korea (formally the Republic of Korea or ROK) during the Korean War (1950-53), after which a demilitarized zone separated the two Koreas. KIM's authoritarian rule included tight control over North Korean citizens and the demonization of the US as the central threat to North Korea's political and social system. In addition, he molded the country's economic, military, and political policies around the core objective of unifying Korea under Pyongyang's control. North Korea also declared a central ideology of juche ("self-reliance") as a check against outside influence, while continuing to rely heavily on China and the Soviet Union for economic support. KIM II Sung's son, KIM Jong II, was officially designated as his father's successor in 1980, and he assumed a growing political and managerial role until the elder KIM's death in 1994. Under KIM Jong II's reign, North Korea continued developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. KIM Jong Un was publicly unveiled as his father's successor in 2010. Following KIM Jong II's death in 2011, KIM Jong Un quickly assumed power and has since occupied the regime's highest political and military posts.

After the end of Soviet aid in 1991, North Korea faced serious economic setbacks that exacerbated decades of economic mismanagement and resource misallocation. Since the mid-1990s, North Korea has faced chronic food shortages and economic stagnation. In recent years, the North's domestic agricultural production has improved but still falls far short of producing sufficient food for its population. Starting in 2002, North Korea began to tolerate semi-private markets but has made few other efforts to meet its goal of improving the overall standard of living. New economic development plans in the 2010s failed to meet government-mandated goals for key industrial sectors, food production, or overall economic performance. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, North Korea instituted a nationwide lockdown that severely restricted its economy and international engagement. Since then, KIM has repeatedly expressed concerns with the regime's economic failures and food problems, but in 2021, he vowed to continue "self-reliant" policies and has reinvigorated his pursuit of greater regime control of the economy.

As of 2024, despite slowly renewing cross-border trade with China, North Korea remained one of the world's most isolated countries and one of Asia's poorest. In 2024, Pyongyang announced it was ending all economic cooperation with South Korea. The move followed earlier proclamations that it was scrapping a 2018 military pact with South Korea to de-escalate tensions along their militarized border, abandoning the country's decades-long pursuit of peaceful unification with South Korea, and designating the South as North Korea's "principal enemy."

Capital name: Pyongyang

Government type dictatorship, single-party communist state

Area total : 120,538 sq km
land: 120,408 sq km
water: 130 sq km

Climate temperate, with rainfall concentrated in summer; long, bitter winters

Natural resources coal, iron ore, limestone, magnesite, graphite, copper, zinc, lead, precious metals, hydropower

Population total: 26,298,666 (2024 est.)

Population growth rate 0.4% (2024 est.)

Ethnic groups racially homogeneous; there is a small Chinese community and a few ethnic Japanese

Religions traditionally Buddhist and Confucian, some Christian and syncretic Chondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way)

Languages Korean

Executive branch chief of state: State Affairs Commission President KIM Jong Un (since 17 December 2011)
head of government: Supreme People's Assembly President CHOE Ryong Hae (since 11 April 2019)

Legislative branch legislature name: Supreme People's Assembly (Choe Go In Min Hoe Ui)

Diplomatic representation in the US none

Diplomatic representation from the US note: North Korea has a Permanent Mission to the UN in New York

Economic overview embassy: none; the Swedish Embassy in Pyongyang represents the US as consular protecting power

one of the last centrally planned economies; hard hit by COVID-19, crop failures, international sanctions, and isolationist policies; declining growth and trade, and heavily reliant on China; poor exchange rate stability; economic data integrity issues

Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$15.416 billion (2023 est.) \$14.959 billion (2022 est.) \$14.982 billion (2021 est.)
Real GDP per capita	\$600 (2023 est.) \$600 (2022 est.) \$600 (2021 est.)
Exports - partners	China 74%, Poland 3%, Senegal 3%, Angola 3%, Austria 3% (2023)
Exports - commodities	false hair, iron alloys, tungsten ore, electricity, cars (2023)
Imports - partners	China 97%, Togo 1%, Peru 1%, Gabon 1%, India 0% (2023)
Imports - commodities	processed hair, plastic products, garments, fabric, soybean oil (2023)

Population Pyramid

