

# Political Sociology in South Korea Engagement with ASEAN: A Constraint of Habit

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## Abstrak

Selama tiga dekade terakhir, Republik Korea secara aktif menjalin keterlibatan dengan ASEAN melalui partisipasinya dalam berbagai forum dialog utama yang dipimpin oleh ASEAN. Namun, keterlibatan Korea Selatan dengan ASEAN sering kali dibayangi oleh hubungan dengan kekuatan-kekuatan besar, khususnya Amerika Serikat, serta isu-isu yang terkait dengan Korea Utara. Berangkat dari pengamatan tersebut, penelitian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor politik domestik yang mempertahankan posisi utama Amerika Serikat dalam kebijakan luar negeri Korea Selatan melalui perspektif foreign policy habit (kebiasaan dalam kebijakan luar negeri). Dengan menggunakan kerangka pembentukan identitas dan distribusi kekuasaan di antara para elit, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa pengalaman historis, terutama Perang Korea dan ancaman Korea Utara yang terus berlangsung, telah membentuk identitas politik yang pro-Amerika Serikat di kalangan elit Korea Selatan. Identitas tersebut kemudian direproduksi di antara para elit, sehingga menciptakan keyakinan dan praktik yang bersifat path-dependent (bergantung) yang menempatkan Amerika Serikat sebagai prioritas utama dalam proses pengambilan keputusan kebijakan luar negeri.

**Kata Kunci:** ASEAN, Korea Selatan, Kebijakan luar negeri, Kebiasaan (Habit), Elite Politik

## Abstract

For the last three decades, the Republic of Korea has actively engaged with ASEAN by participating in major ASEAN-led dialogue platforms. However, existing scholarship argues that South Korea's engagement with ASEAN is often overshadowed by relations with major powers, particularly the United States, and by issues concerning North Korea. Building on this observation, this research investigates the domestic political factors that sustain U.S. primacy in South Korean foreign policy through the lens of foreign policy habit. Drawing on identity formation and the distribution of power

amongst elites, the study argues that historical experiences, especially the Korean War and the enduring North Korean threat, have shaped a pro-U.S. political identity among South Korean elites. This identity is reproduced amongst the elite, creating path-dependent beliefs and practices that put primacy on the U.S. in foreign policy decision-making.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, South Korea, Foreign Policy, Habit, Political Elite

## Introduction

The Republic of Korea (ROK) officially established its relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1989, when it attained the status of ASEAN Dialogue Partner (Indraswari, 2022). Since then, Seoul has continued to actively engage with ASEAN by participating in major ASEAN-led dialogue platforms such as the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) 1999, ARF 1994, East Asia Summit (EAS) 2005, and ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) 2010 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022). However, scholars criticize the ROK's engagement with ASEAN as inconsistent because, under international pressure, Seoul often takes an abrupt halt amid changes in its relations with North Korea or major powers. Therefore, South Korea's policy toward ASEAN is secondary, mainly "overshadowed ... by fluctuations in major power relations and North Korean issues" (Y. S. Kim, 2021).

ASEAN's secondary importance to the ROK is evident in the foreign policy choices made by each presidency. It is evident that, despite the continued commitment to ASEAN, Korean presidents' focus remains on major powers, especially the U.S. To illustrate, Roh Tae Woo initiated engagement with ASEAN, but his 'noordpolitik' emphasized relations with northern neighbors. Kim Young Sam was occupied with the dilemma of asymmetrical alliances with the U.S. Even though ASEAN interest picked up again during the Kim Dae Jung period, he positioned ASEAN as a steppingstone to reach its Northern neighbors, particularly Japan and China, after he realized the U.S. was reluctant to help the economically ailing Korea. Roh Moo Hyun and Lee Myung Bak continued Seoul's engagement with ASEAN. However, neither president developed an ASEAN-focused foreign policy. Roh's strategy as a 'hub' and 'balancer' focused on Northeast Asia, while Lee's 'Global Korea' strategy treats ASEAN as part of its global sphere of influence. ASEAN engagement declined under Park Geun-hye due to domestic missteps. The mounting disappointment from domestic audiences led to her being toppled.

ROK's focus on Southeast Asia then gained traction under Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy (NSP). NSP aimed to elevate ASEAN's status to the level of the ROK's four major traditional powers (the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia) and was heralded as the most consistent foreign policy towards ASEAN. This ASEAN-centric initiative was backed by institutional support and policy directives that addressed comprehensive issues across three pillars: prosperity, peace, and people. In general view, NSP was successful (Indraswari, 2022). Based on ASEAN Korea Center data, the economic relationship is flourishing. In 2021, ASEAN was ROK's second-largest trading partner, surpassing the U.S. and Japan, and the 2nd-largest recipient of ROK ODA, after China and Japan. The ODA trend to ASEAN was increasing, and ASEAN received 28% of the ROK's total global ODA in 2020. People exchange is growing. Among short-term visitors, ASEAN is considered a prominent destination for Koreans, surpassing Japan, China, and the U.S. Furthermore, ASEAN students constitute the second-largest demographic in the ROK's educational landscape (AKC, 2022).

Yet despite these stellar achievements, priority toward the U.S. in ROK foreign policy was reemphasized after the election of conservative party President Yoon Suk Yeol. During his speech,

Yoon stated that Seoul's foreign policy under his administration is rooted in the ROK-US foundation. He sought to expand cooperation beyond traditional geopolitical security matters. In the economy, Yoon has declared that the ROK will join the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF) and Chip 4 to secure chip production with the U.S., Japan, and Taiwan, including setting "technological alliances" on issues such as big data and artificial intelligence. He flew to attend the NATO summit during his 100 days in office, signaling Seoul's alignment with the U.S. This paper thus analyzes the causes of the U.S.'s primacy in ROK's foreign policy by examining the political sociology of elites within Korea's domestic political landscape.

## Method

This research provides a new perspective in explaining ROK's inconsistent foreign policy toward ASEAN by focusing on the role of habit in creating a status quo foreign policy. The analysis section looks at the extent of U.S. focus on foreign policy habits within ROK foreign policy by addressing three main areas, including (i) identity formation, (ii) the power of political elites, in particular the president, and (iii) the limits of other political powers.

Data were collected from secondary sources, including academic literature, journal articles, and speech data from the Korean government website. The speech data consists of archived presidential interviews and speech transcripts that were already available in textual format. They were then processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine the distribution and frequency of keywords, country references, and thematic patterns relevant to the research objectives. The speech analysis is constrained by focusing solely on the speech rather than on the thought processes and experiences of the presidents who produced this vision. Given these limitations, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the follow-up study.

Speech is vital in understanding foreign policy for several reasons. First, speeches act as policy articulation. Leaders frequently use their speeches as a forum to outline and clarify their stances on foreign policy. Secondly, it is a platform for communication outreach. Leaders use speeches to communicate the nation's preferences on alliance preferences. Third, speeches can provide insight into the process of converting foreign policy into policy implementation. Leaders specify their signature policies, including specific actions, projects, or diplomatic endeavors they plan to pursue.

This research covers speeches from 7 (seven) presidencies, from Roh Tae Woo to Moon Jae In. The speech by Roh Tae Woo is included because the ROK formally began engaging with ASEAN in 1989 as a sectoral dialogue partner. In total (Table 1), 5619 speeches were collected from the ROK government's public data services (data.go.kr). The data is then processed into two syllables, separated into Hangeul (Korean alphabet) (Table 2), which depicts the names of partner countries. The frequencies highlight the ROK's point of view on the relevance of Seoul's partners mainly: (i) the U.S., (ii) North Korea, (iii) North Asia traditional partners (China, Japan, and Russia), and, importantly, (iv) ASEAN, both as a regional bloc and as individual countries. Details on data collection on speeches for every president are underlined as follows.

Table 1. Translation from Korean – English on ROK's Partner Mentioned in the Speech

| Korean Alphabet | Translation   |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 미국              | United States |
| 북한              | North Korea   |
| 아세안             | ASEAN         |
| 중국              | China         |
| 일본              | Japan         |
| 러시아             | Russia        |

| Korean Alphabet | Translation |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 인도네시아           | Indonesia   |
| 태국              | Thailand    |
| 싱가포르            | Singapore   |
| 말레이시아           | Malaysia    |
| 필리핀             | Phillipines |
| 라오스             | Laos        |
| 미얀마             | Myanmar     |
| 캄보디아            | Cambodia    |
| 베트남어            | Vietnam     |
| 아시아             | Asia        |

Source: translated data by author, 2026

## Results and Discussion

South Korea sees itself as an ally of the U.S., shares democratic values, and is anti-communist. Economically, it integrates into the liberal world order, relying on the global economy and open markets. South Korea's political identity is shaped by the historical experiences of the Korean War, fostering a pro-US identity. Furthermore, this identity is replicated by the political elite within South Korea. It is strengthened through the executive power of 'the imperial presidency' (E. Lee, 2025) and supported by the bureaucracy with little constraining power from the public and the national assembly. This elite has developed a certain identity, and its iteration creates a 'path dependency' generating a habit in which a certain set of beliefs and behaviors is perceived as 'normal'. This process led to the calculation of national interest that is no longer based on rational measurement, but instead on rooted habit. As a consequence, South Korea's foreign policy is focused on the U.S. and on engagement with ASEAN and is therefore contingent upon it.

### South Korea's Foreign Policy Habit

The analysis of Seoul's persistent focus on the U.S. can be approached via the lens of constructivism, which highlights the importance of ideas in shaping identities. Moreover, the constructivist perspective acknowledges the reciprocal significance of both agents and structure in formulating foreign policy (Erbas, 2021). Within the constructivist framework, the concept of foreign policy habit emphasizes the significant influence of political elites' beliefs on the course of a nation's foreign policy. It is often regarded as similar to bureaucratic politics, as both approaches adopt an agency-focused argument in their analyses of foreign policymaking. However, the logic of habit is not a result of a government bargain driven by organizational and personal interests. Instead, it is due to the belief internalized by political elites.

Patrick Porter (2018) examines the formation of foreign policy habits by looking at U.S. foreign policy. He stressed that U.S. foreign policy shows that decision-makers are not rational but are instead influenced by certain beliefs. This belief, in turn, influences how foreign policy is created. One notable attribute of belief is that, even though it was shaped by prior history, it can still produce similar behavior in the absence of the conditions and environment that prompted its establishment. Foreign policy creation is a continuation of past legacies; thus, Porter argues that habit is a form of path dependency. Because past experiences create foreign policy habits, they work against the logic of consequences, which prioritizes cost-benefit calculation, and the logic of appropriateness, which plays by existing rules and norms (Porter, 2018).

Porter took on the U.S. foreign policy case and argued that 'the habitual ideas' make U.S. grand strategy hard to change. This resistance to change stems from the existing 'foreign policy establishment' advancing a particular view of what U.S. grand strategy should be. He further argues that the habit developed within a group of experts who later "formed into a cohesive, influential class," and "their commitment to [U.S.] primacy became an article of faith" (Porter, 2018, p. 11). Even the president is likely to fall into this status quo and is unable to provide critical evaluations. Changes are only possible when material conditions change sufficiently to challenge the assumption of the status quo, and there are enough agents of change willing to bear domestic costs to bring about change.

In the ROK case, the development of foreign policy habits that prioritize the U.S. has prevented the development of a consistent foreign policy towards ASEAN. Habit creates a condition in which decision-makers adopt certain beliefs that lead them to choose a particular agenda-setting. The establishment of this particular context engenders presumptions that serve as guiding principles for foreign policy choices. Later on, these principles are commonly held by influential members of the foreign policy community.

Habit confirms leaders (and elites) into a status quo that cements a specific foreign policy vision. ROK's inconsistent engagement with ASEAN is due to the prevailing formation of this dominant status quo among leaders. The U.S. focus on the status quo vision within ROK foreign policy can be examined through various factors. In the ROK case, three factors are primarily important: identity formation, the role of executive political elites, and the limited capacity for contention.

Foreign policy is seen not only as a response to external geopolitical rules, but also as a result of domestic factors. Elite habit states that the mental structure of South Korea's elites is conditioned by their country's history. The experiences of the Korean War and the North Korean existential threat have created a fixed idea that South Korea's security can only be ensured by a security alliance with the United States. So even though South Korea's domestic capacity is increasing, the elite retain their view of U.S. primacy. Furthermore, this view is "shared" within this elite in South Korea, especially by the president.

### Identity Formation: Historical Experiences after the Korean War

The concept of identity, which constructivist scholars consider a pivotal factor, influences how leaders develop their foreign policy strategies. A country's historical experiences vividly explain the formation of identity. The U.S. closely assisted the formative years of the ROK's modern nation-building. The U.S.'s engagement in the Korean War may be traced back to its pivotal role in securing victory against the DPRK. In the wake of the Korean War, to ensure security, both countries agreed to establish the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953. Since then, the U.S. has poured military and economic aid into the ROK, peaking between 1954 and 1958 at a total exceeding 7 billion USD (P. H. Kim, 2017). U.S. influence continued after the ROK's founding, creating a shared identity among Koreans towards the U.S.

The U.S.'s primacy in ROK security foreign policy is rooted in history. ROK's modern state formation was dependent on the U.S. Not only did the U.S. fight for the South against the North during the Korean War, but it also provided a post-war security guarantee. The U.S. became a ROK ally because it intervened in the Korean War to ward off a North Korean invasion. Over 33,000 US troops were killed, and 100,000 were wounded. In 1953, both countries signed a Mutual Defense Treaty that binds each party to come to the other's defense. Out of this treaty, the U.S. maintains around 5% of its troops to supplement the S.K. armed forces. Korea is the 3rd largest U.S. military deployment

destination after Japan and Germany (Shin & Lee, 2021). As for the Northern region, China and Japan are geographically circling DPRK and thus serve as core nodes within the regional security dynamic. Beijing is Pyongyang's close ally. Despite the bitter history of Seoul, Tokyo is Washington's main ally. Considering Washington's role as a security patron, Seoul engaged in awkward trilateral relations and regarded the northern neighbor as critical to the North's development. This early security dynamic shapes Seoul's foreign policy design, in which the U.S. occupies a unique and crucial position for the ROK.

Historically, the invasion of the North, backed by the Soviet Union and China in the 1950s, positioned the U.S. as Seoul's security guarantor. Additionally, the bipolar structure of the international system endorsed bandwagoning with the U.S. However, the current decline in North Korea's security power relative to the increasing strength of the ROK's national capacity, especially its military, has altered the ROK's power to a level very different from that of the 1950s. In 1946, the ROK army had only 25,000 troops, which has grown to 560,000, exceeding the U.S. Army's global strength of 475,000 (Mizokami, 2020). Military balance Data in 2015 show a comparison between the South and North Korean Militaries. The North's military statistics are higher in terms of the number of troops, artillery pieces, and submarines. In contrast, the South excels in tanks, combat aircraft, helicopters, and frigates/destroyers. However, despite the large number of soldiers, North Korean manpower is lower, as they are underpaid and malnourished. Conversely, South Korean troops are equipped with modern state-of-the-art military technology and equipment (McCarthy, 2017). In 2023, military development showed better results. According to Global Fire Power, the South's power index is at an optimal 0.15, compared to the North's at 0.5. Seoul ranks 6/145 compared to Pyongyang at rank 34/145. The South had primacy over the North in all military categories, including manpower, airpower, land power, and naval power. Supported by national resources, financial logistics, and geography (GFP, 2023). Nuclear power remains the looming threat, and the gap in security assessments between the North and the South persists. The alliances with the U.S. will provide this nuclear coverage. However, in the case of undesirable changes in U.S. leadership, South Korea has prepared the Kill Chain pre-emptive strategy and Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (IKMPR) should the North decide to deploy its nuclear arsenal (Larson, 2020). Casualties are unavoidable, but Seoul is more equipped to deter and address Pyongyang than before. ROK has turned itself into a militarily capable power; thus, threat perception has decreased due to increased national military capability. Additionally, the end of the Cold War ushered in a multipolar world. Global power was decentralized outside of the U.S., and at the same time, the ROK normalized its relations with Russia and China in the early 1990s. Subsequent 'amicable' contact with North Korea was established through the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression and Exchanges and Cooperation between South and North Korea (1991), followed by the 2000 Summit Meeting. Amidst this development, there should be fewer needs for the U.S.

On the economic front, the causal relations wisdom posits that the greater the economic interaction, the greater the importance of one state to the other. Economic interdependency drives ROK foreign policy decisions. Seoul was highly interdependent with the U.S. post the Korean War. The U.S. not only provided economic aid that accounted for 70% of Seoul's total imports in the 1950s but also paved the way for early engagement in global trade (Stangarone, 2013).

Dan Reiter (1994) identifies the main components of identity as involving the actor's learning process. He sees that the alliance's choice is generated endogenously rather than exogenously. Meaning that the lessons learned during their formative years as a national entity are what influence state choices on alliances. This indigenous approach stands in opposition to the balance-of-threat

arguments. Endogenously laden, the balance of threat assumes that the state seeks an alliance due to a perceived external threat. Reiter argues that alliance choices are determined by "lessons drawn from significant foreign policy experiences: continuity follows successes while innovation follows failures. Reiter argued that the decision-making process is a learning application. Organizational theories and social psychology highlight the learning process of creating a strong belief system resistant to change. Only in responding to a crisis can this belief system (inertia) be changed. As such, the ROK saw the U.S. as its most reliable ally because the U.S. had saved the ROK from aggression by North Korea and from Japanese colonization. In the ROK case, Reiter's learning theory suggests that, because Seoul has limited experience in becoming a modern state, it has developed a learning habit dependent on the U.S. (Reiter, 1994). This socio-historical construction of the Korean War creates an elite group psychology that is dependent on the U.S.

### Power of the Executive (President)

The core of foreign policy habit is the belief internalized by political elites. ROK leaders and institutions become subjects of discussion in perpetuating the habit. Hudson addresses a very important question: when is an individual leader a determinant variable in foreign policy analysis? Prerequisite conditions include regime type, the leader's personal interest in foreign policy, crisis, and uncertainty/ambiguity (Hudson, 2014). Additionally, Hermann added that the degree of diplomatic training a leader has and their knowledge of specific regions or issues contribute to their foreign policy decision-making (Hermann, 1980). Meanwhile, Lebow (1981), for example, shows how a leader makes a decision. He argued that the assessment of historical failure and success determines foreign policy choices. However, Lebow stresses that this cycle of past understanding creates inertia that masks leaders from assessing the problem at hand. Thus, leaders fail to respond appropriately due to the cognitive deficiencies inherent in the established belief (Lebow, 1981).

Research on ROK leaders is being conducted in the context of their foreign-policy signature. Park and Chi highlight Kim Dae Jung's perception of cooperative strategy in East Asia post the Cold War period (Park & Chi, 2009). Meanwhile, Jang focuses on Roh Moo Hyun's strategy for Seoul as a great-power balancer (Jang, 2005). Yet, a discussion towards ASEAN engagement is rarely explored during early Korean presidencies. Only after President Moon Jae-in showed extraordinary interest in ASEAN did research examine the direct policy link between the ROK and ASEAN. Unlike previous ROK presidents, who have not specified or articulated their ASEAN interests beyond routine attendance at ASEAN-related meetings, Moon's NSP is distinctly pro-ASEAN. As the first Korean president to personally visit all 10 ASEAN countries, Moon's behavior offers a glimpse into the role of leadership in foreign policymaking (Chongkittavorn, 2022).

In the Korean context, foreign policy formulation falls under the purview of the executive branch, specifically the president. Bae Ki Hyun asserts that the 'irregularity' and 'limited' progress in political and security relations between the ROK and ASEAN can be attributed to a disparity in conception originating with the Korean executive leadership (Bae, 2020). Bae contends that the Korean leader's focus on regional political and security diplomacy has fluctuated, contingent on the degree of influence the executive office wields.

The Korean president has amassed significant power to determine the trajectory of the state's foreign policy. As such, the inconsistencies in Korean foreign policy towards ASEAN can be attributed to changes in the president's vision. The president's strong executive power is evident in the ROK's domestic affairs. Therefore, the president's view is reflected in ROK foreign policy. Snyder argues that this concentration of power is possible because of the adopted constitutional framework. The

current constitutional mandate of a one-term presidency vests significant power in the executive, as there is no consideration of re-election to a second term. He argues that the concentration of power creates an imperial presidency, in which executive authority becomes overly strong. This one-term inefficiency system, Snyder argues, serves as a domestic obstacle to foreign policy (Snyder, 2018).

A foreign policy habit develops when political elites hold particular views on the course of foreign policy. Due to the political system that vests significant power in the executive branch, foreign policy falls within the purview of the executive office. Thus, the executive, the president, dominates and decides on the foreign policy trajectory. Hence, the president determines the ROK's foreign policy engagement not only in the ROK's relationship with North Korea or the U.S.

Table 2. Number of Speeches of Each President

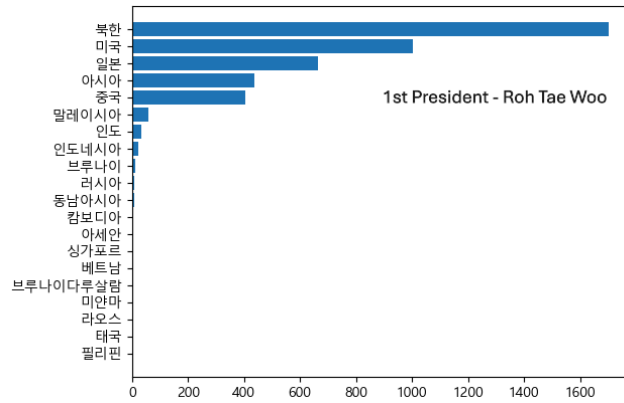
| President     | Number of Data | Number of Tokens |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| Roh Tae Woo   | 601            | 292,916          |
| Kim Young Sam | 728            | 267,389          |
| Kim Dae Jung  | 821            | 55,362           |
| Roh Moo Hyun  | 768            | 282,958          |
| Lee Myung Bak | 816            | 69,090           |
| Park Geun Hye | 493            | 157,209          |
| Moon Jae In   | 1392           | 438,579          |

Source: compiled by author through [www.dams.pa.go.kr](http://www.dams.pa.go.kr), accessed June 2026

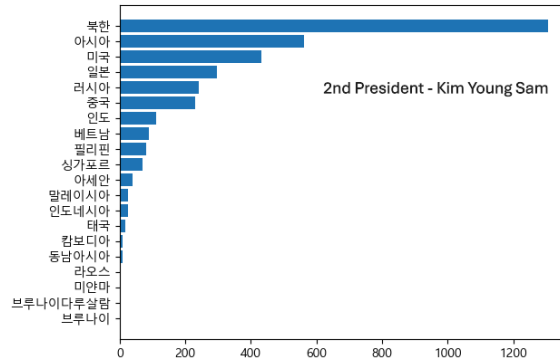
Table 2 presents the number of interview records collected for each ROK president. The number of tokens represents the total number of words extracted from the interview transcripts. Based on these data, further analysis was conducted to obtain an overview of the interview content. The frequencies of references to the U.S., North Korea, and ASEAN countries across the ROK presidents are illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 1. ROK President content speech

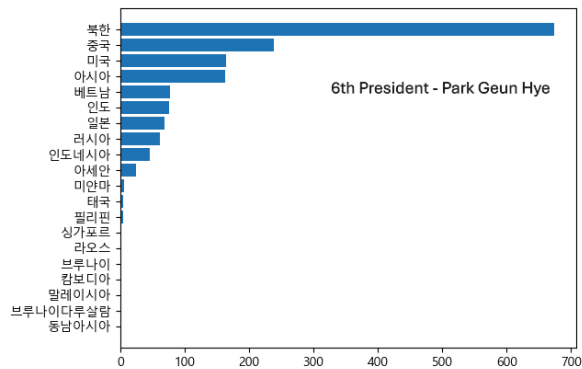
Roh Tae Woo



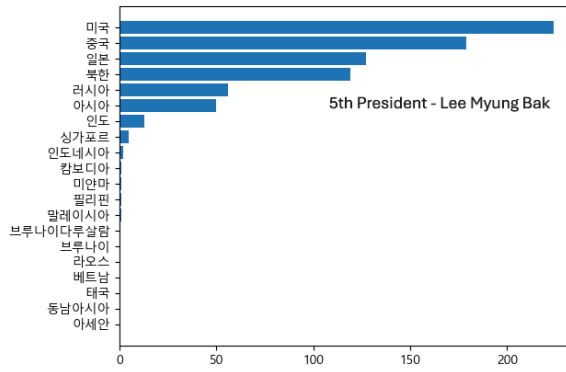
Kim Young Sam



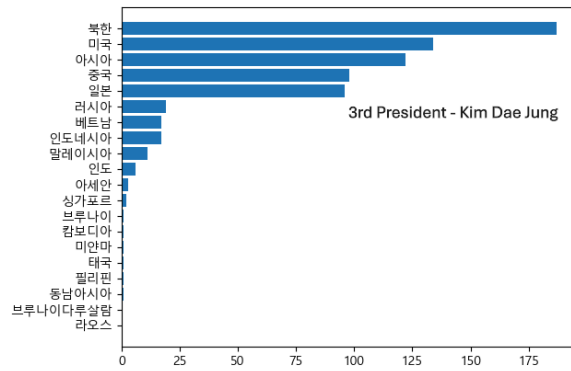
Park Geun Hye



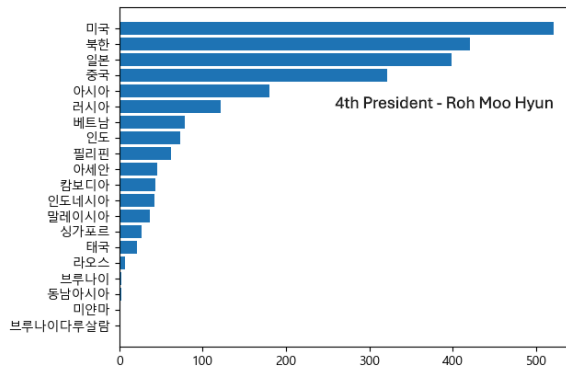
### Lee Myung Bak



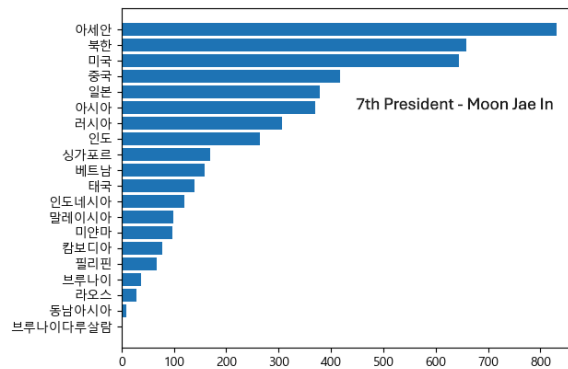
### Kim Dae Jung



### Roh Moo Hyun



## Moon Jae In



Source: Primary analysis by author, 2026

As shown above, all conservative presidents prioritized the importance of establishing strong connections with the U.S., mainly due to its crucial role in handling the threat posed by North Korea. The majority of the three presidents' speeches identified North Korea as the primary focus, except for Lee Myung Bak, who placed greater emphasis on the U.S. rather than North Korea. Yet the primary focus remains on the northeast countries, including China and Japan. In contrast, regarding the ROK's engagement with ASEAN, all presidents pay comparatively little attention to it. The primary focus of ROK participation in Southeast Asia is on individual countries, particularly Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore.

### The Limit of Contending Power

Moreover, the limited constraints due to the relative weakness of contending powers allow the executive to attain significant power. Kim Jiyeon further explains that public opinion has not consistently been effective in restraining the president's authority. This is especially relevant in South Korea's case, where recent domestic election research has been linked to generational and gender distributions (Indraswari, 2025); hence, political education is gaining importance (Malihah et al., 2024). Although in a democratic country public opinion is needed for analyzing foreign policymaking, Kim argues that the role of public opinion is overrated, as the public tends to follow and more readily support a president they trust (J. Kim, 2018). The popular president is better positioned to influence public opinion. Thus, when the approval rating is high, the president has the public's full support. Consequently, controversial issues matter less, and the president dictates the foreign policy.

Lee Geun (2018) brought 'the stop at the water's edge' discussion into ROK foreign policy by focusing on the role of the National Assembly in foreign policymaking. Lee observed that the National Assembly has been extremely vocal. According to historical records, the National Assembly attempted to intervene in international affairs. It also employs direct diplomacy with foreign governments, in particular with Japan. It was granted greater legislative power under the 2012 National Assembly law on issues pertaining to the ROK's vital interests, major trade deals, and peace on the Korean Peninsula. Lee also stressed the National Assembly's ability to stir public opinion. Article 61 of the Constitution empowers the National Assembly to subpoena the government and compel disclosure of sensitive documents to inform the public. Aside from trade deals, the National Assembly can directly appeal to the public on issues related to North Korea, Japan, and the U.S.-ROK alliance.

However, despite this apparent power, Lee argues that the National Assembly has limited authority in ROK foreign policy formulation compared to the president (G. Lee, 2018). The phrase "party lines stop at the water's edge" presupposes that the state acts in a unified manner on foreign issues. Party ideology is irrelevant as foreign policy is not a partisan issue. Presidents have had more success in Congress on foreign policy than domestic policy. "Bipartisanship has not changed much over the years... and presidents can still construct bipartisan coalitions in support of their preferred foreign policies if they so desire" (Chaudoin et al., 2010, p. 78). In this way, other political elites are conditioned to support the president's foreign policy preferences. Moreover, the imperial presidencies in South Korea further reiterated U.S. primacy in the ROK's foreign policy.

## Conclusion

The foreign policy habits approach helps explain the inconsistencies in the ROK's foreign policy towards ASEAN. Despite the evolving security and economic landscape, ROK's foreign policy continues to prioritize the U.S. The potential threat posed by North Korea persists. However, the ROK currently has a broader array of resources to address this threat. These resources include domestic development initiatives as well as the evolving international system towards a multipolar system. A comparable pattern is also observed in economics. Yet, ROK foreign policy is resistant to change and remains focused on the U.S. This dependency can be attributed to established foreign policy habits.

The existence of these habits in ROK foreign policy can be further observed through three main areas. First, a common identity between Korea and the U.S. has developed since the early stages of modern Korea's development. Second, the authority of the president. The government, particularly the President of Korea, has consistently pursued a foreign policy agenda centered on the country's relationship with the U.S. Third, there is a lack of competing powers; instead, political elites support primacy towards the U.S. through partisan support in foreign policy. Moreover, within agencies, especially the MOFA and MND, the United States-based bureau has obtained a privileged position relative to other agencies, and a prevailing inclination towards the United States is widely shared. Furthermore, the significance of public opinion in shaping the ROK's foreign policy is sometimes exaggerated, with its influence limited to rare instances. As shown, a popular president can shape public opinion and garner support from it.

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