

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing  
On  
North Korean Human Rights Movement:  
Current Prospects and Obstacles

April 28, 2026 – 12:30 p.m.  
2118 Rayburn HOB

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I'd like to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Co-chairs Congressman Chris Smith and Congressman James McGovern, the Commission Members and the Staff for this opportunity to provide testimony.

I retired from the US Air Force as a Lt Col. Currently, I'm an Academic Council Member of the Victims of Communism (VOC) Memorial Foundation and a Fellow at the Institute for Korean-American Studies. I focus on the Korean Peninsula—North Korea during my earlier years, and lately, South Korea. I'm honored to be here today.

South Korea, aka the Republic of Korea (ROK), which was established in 1948, is an important refuge for North Korean defectors seeking freedom. The defectors from North Korea have a place to go. Of course, it's a very difficult and dangerous journey to leave North Korea and reach South Korea. But once they arrive in South Korea, they get their national identification card. They get ROK citizenship. It's automatic.

This place of freedom, however, is losing its freedom. There are more and more restrictions on freedom in the Republic of Korea—restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and other freedoms.

Increasingly, the measures to suppress freedom are being codified into laws, and now they are even trying to change the constitution. And who are the people so focused on eroding freedom in South Korea? They are pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP), pro-Korean Workers' Party (in North Korea), anti-ROK, anti-U.S. and anti-Japan. They now control the majority of the levers of power in South Korea.

Today, I'll highlight 3 areas:

- The efforts to change the ROK constitution to pull it away from a freedom-based market economy toward socialism/communism.
- Suppression of Freedom of Speech
- Suppression of Freedom of Religion

## **Republic of Korea Constitution**

As mentioned earlier, North Korean defectors receive ROK citizenship automatically. That's because of the ROK Constitution, specifically Article 3.

Article 3:

"The territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean peninsula and its adjacent islands."

The constitution is replete with references to the concept of freedom, such as "free democratic basic order" in Article 4. Article 20 guarantees freedom of religion. Article 21 guarantees freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association.

But the Lee Jae-myung administration, the Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) & its associated political parties are about to change the constitution. The public does not demand this change. It is only a small segment of the society, specifically, those who are pro-CCP and pro-socialism, who want it. But the details about the changes are not available to the public.

So I go back to 2018 under the Moon Jae-in administration, and his party, the DPK, and their efforts to change the constitution at that time, including trying to

delete the word “freedom” from the constitution to show what they’re planning to do. At that time, they proposed:

- Delete “Free Democracy as the basic order” for the ROK
- Add “The realization of a flexible and equal democratic society”
- Delete “free market economy”
- Add “equal democratic society”
- Added the term “social economy”<sup>1</sup>

What may sound like subtle word substitutions are fundamental changes to the political and economic system of the ROK.

The intention is clear. All these changes show a move away from a freedom-based democracy and market economy toward socialism, which is central planning and central distribution. It’s about taking the choices and decision making away from individuals and concentrating them centrally in the government. It’s about eroding individual freedom, because the state makes all the decisions, like in North Korea. There, the state determines where you live, where you work, whether you go to college or not, whether you can attend a family funeral in a different city or not. We call this totalitarianism.

Out of all these proposed changes, the DPK made deleting freedom from the ROK constitution its party platform in 2018. They withdrew their efforts to do so after they faced immense opposition. They then bided their time.

They’re again trying to change the constitution to change the fundamental nature of the freedom-based republic, but less obviously this time, by being quiet about the substance and content.

Since what they’re trying to change is not widely known, it is more difficult to find what these changes are, but the one that keeps emerging is adding violent events, which they label “democracy movements” into the constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> Yang, Seung-shik, “Even the Constitution is Facing Left...Even Abolishing Temporary Employment is Inserted” (헌법도 좌향좌... '비정규직 폐지'까지 넣었다), *Chosun.com*, January 2, 2018, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2018/01/02/2018010200230.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/01/02/2018010200230.html)

They likely have plans for other changes. But one thing is clear. They're trying to change the constitution quickly. In order to do so, the DPK and smaller parties with shared outlook are trying to pass a law to have a referendum to change the constitution in the upcoming elections in a little over a month.

On June 3, 2026 (and in early voting on May 29-30, 2026), nation-wide regional elections will be held in South Korea. These are elections for provincial governors, mayors at the city, county, and district-levels, legislatures at the city, county, and district levels, education superintendents at the city, county, and district-levels. These elections are significant, and involve a far larger number of elected officials than the general election.

And Chinese citizens (who are green card holders—after 3 years residency in South Korea) can vote in South Korean regional elections. Once these Chinese citizens register to vote, then they can vote in Korean regional elections, even if they live in China.

Korean elections, especially since the April 2020 elections, have been mired in election fraud controversies, such as more ballots than registered voters, stacks of pristine unfolded ballots found in piles in ballot containers, and 3,170 votes in a row counted for 1 candidate by a ballot counting machine.

So the DPK and the Lee Jae-myung administration want to add the referendum to change the constitution to occur during the June 3 elections. Meanwhile, the controversy over the problems with the processes and methods of elections have not been resolved.

The massive number of Koreans who have been protesting—holding up the ROK and US flags, against CCP influence, against those in power who are steering the country toward socialism—are concerned. They do not want the country to turn communist. They do not want the socialist agenda to be reflected in the constitution.

Again, the DPK and the like-minded political parties want to change the constitution and to do it quickly.

## **Suppression of Freedom of Speech**

One item that would be added to the constitution, which surfaced recently, is “5.18.” The political parties pursuing socialist agenda want to put “5.18,” a violent event, in the constitution.

“5.18” was an incident which occurred on dates that included May 18, 1980 in Gwangju. It is often referred to as the “Gwangju Uprising” in English and in Korean, simply “5.18.” This is very controversial in South Korea. Those in power now label it a “democracy movement,” while others call it a riot or a rebellion.

And this leads to my next topic, suppression of freedom of speech.

Several years ago, the National Assembly (Korea’s version of U.S. Congress) passed the “5.18 History Distortion Law” that allows the government to punish people with up to 5 years imprisonment and fines if they say 5.18 was a riot or that North Korea was involved. In fact, they already put a Vietnam Veteran, who researched 5.18, in prison for 2 years. That was Dr. Jee Man-won. He was in his 80s.

Now, they’re investigating a youth, and one of the questions they asked him during an investigation was “why do you not call 5.18 a democracy movement?”

Why would they try to silence people from saying anything other than their narrative, even passing a law to imprison people? Moreover, why is it important to rush and put it in the constitution?

Another issue that gets censored is criticism of Communist China.

More than 80%, and 90% in some surveys, of South Koreans do not like China, especially after they realized that Chinese influence on domestic politics is so prevalent in South Korea.

Banners that criticize the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or calls for an investigation into election fraud are being labeled as “hate speech,” and get investigated just as they do inside the PRC.

At an anti-CCP rally in October 2025, Korean youths tore up the Communist China's flag. The police then investigated them.

But when an anti-US group tore up a US flag in front of the US Embassy in Seoul, nothing happened to them. No investigations. So this is prejudicial.

Yet another topic that gets censored is election fraud.

The National Election Commission (NEC) even tried to push for a law that punishes people who raise concerns about election fraud. This was revealed in late December 2024.<sup>2</sup>

On May 14, 2025, less than 3 weeks away from the presidential election in South Korea, the platform *X Korea* suspended the account of presidential candidate HWANG Kyo-ahn (황교안), who has been calling for election integrity.

On April 16, 2026, JEON han-gil, a history lecturer and a YouTube political commentator, was handcuffed and taken in by the police, and the reason was "defamation" of politicians, including Lee Jae-myung. But he was not even charged, and the police did not have an arrest warrant.

In January 2025, DPK lawmaker JEON Yong-gi (전용기) stated publicly that the DPK will absolutely file charges with the police against anyone who posts comments they don't like on social media.

When the DPK files complaints, the police take action by starting an investigation. What are topics that the DPK doesn't approve of? Election fraud issues, such as:

- "196 year-old voted" (which was based on the official record)
- "China interfered in the elections."
- "North Korea interfered in the elections."

The DPK urges people to report them to the "DPK police station" (not real police station), a website, under the heading "Jail."

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<sup>2</sup> Lee Seul-gi, "National Election Commission Pushes for Legislation to 'punish those who raise suspicions of election fraud'" (선관위, '부정선거 의혹 제기하면 처벌' 입법 추진), *HanKyung*, 2024-12-22, <https://www.chosun.com/politics/2024/12/23/NSPZHP227ZA4VOTCXS77LU2QYU/>

This sounds more like North Korea and the PRC, but this is occurring in South Korea.

To help understand the scope of the problem, it's useful to point out that the major media in South Korea do not report in the news on massive rallies where people call for defending South Korea, a strong alliance with the U.S., "CCP Out," or for the government to investigate election fraud. Thus, people share these events through social media. And the social media—YouTube (Google Korea), X Korea, Facebook, Threads, etc. are then subsequently censored, as if copying censorship practices of the PRC.

### **Suppression of Freedom of Religion**

Under the Lee Jae-myung administration, pastors have been jailed. This is even before any trial.

Pastor Son Hyun-bo was arrested and jailed in September 2025.

Pastor Son, who organized national prayer rallies against the political tyranny of the pro-CCP/communist factions, was jailed for inviting a conservative education superintendent candidate to speak at his church—they called it a "violation of the election law."<sup>3</sup> He faced over 20 lawsuits, the majority of them were filed by the controversial & above-the-law National Election Commission. His church was raided. He was released eventually due to international pressure.

In another case, Pastor Chun Gwang-hoon was arrested and jailed on January 22, 2026. He also led prayers and peaceful rallies, where people held the ROK and US flags to show support for a strong US-ROK alliance and asked to hold the elected officials accountable, at Gwanghwamun, a large public square in Seoul. His church had also been raided multiple times and his church members were attacked in the past during Moon Jae-in administration. Pastor Chun was released on bail and under various restrictions earlier this month.

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<sup>3</sup> Lee, Dae-woong, "손현보 목사 '감옥 가는 것, 하나도 겁나지 않아'" (Pastor Son Hyun-bo: "Not Afraid of Going to Jail"), *Christian Today*, 2025-9-7, <https://www.christiantoday.co.kr/news/370514>

These are the same tactics that the PRC used against Hong Kong citizens who protested against communism in Hong Kong. Jimmy Lai, owner of the *Apple Daily* in Hong Kong, faced similar persecution from the CCP before eventually being arrested, prosecuted, and jailed for speaking out.

Another pastor in Gwangju was fined in 2024, because in 2022, he expressed his concern about Lee Jae-myung pursuing communist policies and the dominance of Juche ideologists (KimIlSungists) in South Korean politics.<sup>4</sup> He said, “if the DPK wins, they’ll jail us.” He’s not wrong.

What do all these cases have in common? These pastors opposed South Korea turning communist, and orienting toward communist China and North Korea. And for expressing that view, they are harassed, jailed, and fined.

Lawfare is used in a different way as well. The DPK recently introduced a bill to suppress freedom of religion. Churches are registered as legal entities in South Korea. Under this proposed bill, the government can revoke the approval that established a legal entity like a church. It also requires the confiscation of church property. Those who want to pass the bill state that these measures apply to churches for “interfering in politics.”

The Korean Church strongly opposes this bill, citing that it infringes upon freedom of religion, which is guaranteed in the ROK constitution.

This bill was recently retracted after heavy opposition by Christians, but there’s a record of these lawmakers reintroducing the same unconstitutional content in bills over and over.

As a note, the Republic of Korea is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest Christian country in Asia, in terms of percentage of population, right after the Philippines. The first-ever session of the National Assembly in Korea in 1948 began with a prayer to God. But now, the lawmakers pursuing socialist/communist policies at the National Assembly are trying to oppress the Church with lawfare. It’s a terrible contradiction for the institution.

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<sup>4</sup> Lee, Young-sub, “대전 앞두고 ‘민주당 되면 감옥간다’ 설교한 목사... 벌금 확정” (Fines Confirmed for a Pastor Who Said “If the DPK wins, They’ll Jail Us” Before the Presidential Election ), *Yonhap News*, 2024-9-29, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20240927141200004>

## Conclusion

The Republic of Korea has been seen as a shining example of America's success story. It adopted an American-style freedom-based political and economic system, and thrived. Unlike North Korea, where people lack freedom and food, South Koreans enjoyed freedom & prosperity. But that's changing. I just provided some examples of suppression of freedom of religion and freedom of speech. And they—those in South Korea who are supportive of the communist parties of China and North Korea, and who are anti-US, anti-ROK, anti-Japan—are trying to change the fundamental nature of the ROK by deleting freedom from the constitution, and adding a socialist agenda into it, which would essentially turn South Korea into a satellite state of Communist China.

While the anti-freedom faction has taken control over the levers of power, including the government and the major media, there are South Korean patriots who are desperately fighting against this potential outcome. They don't want Korea to become similar to Venezuela under Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro. They call for "CCP Out," because they don't want to be a vassal state of the PRC. We should listen to them and voice support for freedom.

Thank you.

[Disclaimer: The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of any other organizations I have been associated with, including the U.S. Air Force and the VOC Memorial Foundation.]

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