

**S.Korea conservatives win parliamentary poll, boost for Park**  
**Reuters**  
**April 12 , 2012**

SEOUL, April 12 — South Korea's ruling conservative party has clung on to a parliamentary majority, losing fewer seats than forecast and bolstering the presidential ambitions of its leader Park Geun-hye, the daughter of a strong-arm ruler who was assassinated.

Despite a strong challenge from the liberal opposition and millions of disaffected young voters, the pro-business New Frontier or Saenuri Party got a wafer-thin majority of 152 seats in the 300-strong assembly, election results today showed.

Opinion polls had forecast a hung parliament, while other experts had expected the Twitter generation, or the under-40 voters who make up a large chunk of the electorate, would hand the liberals a win.

But all the opposition could do was to cut the conservative majority from 162 seats in the previous election.

"We will make a fresh start... We will embrace all generations and classes," said Park, 60, who has been dubbed the "Queen of Elections" for poll wins in the past when the conservatives were headed towards electoral oblivion.

Even though the conservatives were once again tainted by allegations of sleaze in the run-up to the elections, Park appears to have captured the popular mood in South Korea, the world's 13th largest economy, by moving to the left with promises of more welfare spending.

She has tried to distance the party from President Lee Myung-bak, whose economic initiatives are credited with pulling Seoul out of the 2008 global downturn faster than other countries but alienated workers and middle-class voters.

Her leadership council rejected the government's plan to privatise part of the rail service. She has also spoken of the need to boost welfare programmes, and create jobs for the young.

Park acted as first lady in the 1970s after her mother was shot and killed by a pro-Pyongyang assassin who aimed for her father, Park Chung-hee. He himself was assassinated by his intelligence chief in 1979 after 17 years in office.

The quietly spoken Park, who has promised to engage more with North Korea if it abandons its nuclear ambitions, was the one politician with genuine national appeal to campaign. This win for the conservatives sets her up as the favourite when South Korea votes in December to replace Lee, whose mandatory single-term presidency ends next year.

"The election outcome is an undeniable victory for Park Geun-hye's leadership," said Jeong Han-wool of the East Asia Institute in Seoul.

"Winning a majority is not an easy task even under favourable conditions. The fact she single-handedly managed the ruling camp to win the majority is a testimony to her strength within the party circle and appeal to public."

Potential left-wing candidates such as computer mogul Ahn Cheol-soo sat on the sidelines of the parliamentary campaign. So it was not possible to gauge what his appeal could be in the presidential election were he to stand.

The powerful presidency is the main prize in South Korean politics and Park will still face a tough battle to win if the left manages to find a credible contender with national appeal.

"In the parliamentary election people vote based on the issues related to their towns but the presidential election is different," said Im Hyug-baeg, a professor of political science at Korea University in Seoul. "People will look for the best candidate capable of becoming a national hero." — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/s.korea-conservatives-win-parliamentary-poll-boost-for-park/>