

South Korea : failed arrest of impeached president sets stage for more turmoil in 2025

lundi 6 janvier 2025, par [WALKER Yoon](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 3 janvier 2025).

On Friday morning, officials abandoned an attempt to detain South Korea's embattled president, throwing the country deeper into chaos.

It was a tumultuous end to 2024 for South Korea. On December 14, the country's president, Yoon Suk Yeol, was [impeached](#) over his short-lived declaration of martial law. Then, just two weeks later, South Korean lawmakers voted to [impeach his replacement](#), Han Duck-soo, accusing him of colluding with his predecessor.

Yoon now faces the prospect of arrest – a first for a sitting president in South Korea – over insurrection charges after the Seoul Western District Court [issued a warrant](#) for his detention on December 31. However, an attempt by South Korean officials to arrest Yoon in his residence was [abandoned on Friday morning](#) following a tense six-hour standoff with the presidential security team.

The Corruption Investigation Office (CIO), which has been investigating Yoon's martial law declaration, [says it has](#) “determined that the arrest is practically impossible”. It announced that it would discuss further action, but stopped short of saying whether it would attempt to detain Yoon again. The arrest warrant is valid until Monday, January 6.

The events of the past month have thrown South Korea into political chaos. Deep divisions have emerged between politicians loyal to Yoon and those looking to oust him. And public unrest is growing, with citizens split between calls for impeachment and support for Yoon's presidency.

Yoon's supporters, an estimated 1,200 of whom had gathered outside his residence while officials attempted to execute the arrest warrant, [celebrated](#) as the suspension was announced. The crowd broke out into song and dance and [chanted](#) : “We won !”

The crisis is, at the same time, damaging the country's [already fragile economy](#). The South Korean won has [plunged to its lowest level](#) against the US dollar in almost 16 years and the stock market has tumbled. South Korea now faces the challenge of navigating these precarious times while striving to restore stability and severely damaged public trust in its institutions.

Photo : South Korea was thrown into political crisis after Yoon declared martial law in early December. Yonhap / EPA

The failure to arrest Yoon was not entirely unexpected. After the warrant was issued, Yoon expressed his defiance to the court ruling through a letter to his supporters. He urged them to resist and [stated](#) : “I will fight until the end to protect this country together with you.”

Yoon's [legal team argued](#) that the warrant was both illegal and invalid. And his political ally, Yoon Sang-hyun, [described the efforts](#) to arrest and investigate President Yoon as “dangerous acts to

preempt the impeachment trial of the constitutional court”.

The court must deliver a final ruling on Yoon’s impeachment within 180 days of the date the case was filed. And with the addition of justices Moon Hyung-bae and Lee Mi-sun on January 2, completing an eight-member bench, the court is expediting the impeachment trial process.

The legal community expects the court to issue its ruling before April 18, when two more justices, Jeong Gye-seon and Cho Han-chang, retire. But Yoon’s legal team is demanding a “fair trial”, and has insisted that the full 180-day legal deadline be used for the proceedings. If this request is granted, the final verdict may not be reached until June.

Since the impeachment vote was passed in the National Assembly, Yoon has made every effort to obstruct the process. He [refused to appear](#) before the prosecution and [failed to comply](#) with the CIO’s summons for questioning. This is what ultimately led to an arrest warrant being issued.

Yoon’s behaviour has been interpreted by many observers as an attempt to delay the investigation and mobilise his supporters. This is driven by the belief that mounting a strong defence would become significantly more difficult if he were to be detained.

Growing political polarisation

Since December 3, the night martial law was declared, hundreds of thousands of South Koreans have gathered across the country to demand Yoon’s impeachment. The younger generation has taken a leading role in the movement, creating a protest culture [infused with elements](#) from K-pop fandom, including glowing light sticks and rallies [resembling a dancefloor](#).

Another notable and unique feature of the protests has been the distribution of [free food and drinks](#) to participants, generously paid for at nearby cafes and restaurants by fellow Koreans eager to support the cause.

Meanwhile, protests by Yoon’s supporters have intensified. These demonstrations are being driven by largely older and more conservative people. Far-right YouTube personalities and evangelical Christian leaders have often [taken prominent roles](#).

Pro-Yoon protesters have [incorporated](#) the American right’s “stop the steal” slogan into their demonstrations, and frequently [display US flags](#) as part of their movement.

Echoing Yoon’s rhetoric, they argue that the declaration of martial law was a legitimate act of governance and claim that the [general election](#) in April 2024 was rigged in favour of the opposition party. The ruling party secured just 108 seats out of the 300 in the National Assembly, while the opposition bloc claimed 192 to retain control of parliament.

Photo : Yoon supporters gather as members of the Corruption Investigation Office wait to enter the presidential residence in Seoul. Jeon Hyun-Kyun / EPA

On the economic front, the South Korean won has fallen to its [lowest value since 2009](#), with the foreign exchange rate reacting sharply to the continued political turmoil. This volatility [has also affected](#) South Korea’s major stock market index, highlighting growing investor uncertainty.

The depreciation of the won is expected to raise the cost of imports further, exacerbate inflationary pressure, weaken consumer confidence, and potentially discourage foreign investment. This will only add further strain on the economy, which suffered a prolonged [period of low growth](#) throughout

much of 2024.

As South Korea embarks on 2025, the road ahead remains uncertain and fraught with challenges. The nation must contend with the complex interplay of political instability and economic fragility, balancing the need for accountability with efforts to restore public trust and unity.

How South Korea addresses these pressing issues in the coming months will not only define the year ahead, but will also have a lasting effect on its political, social and economic trajectory.

[Yoon Walker](#), PhD Candidate in the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, [SOAS, University of London](#)

< !—> <http://theconversation.com/republishing-guidelines> —>

P.-S.

- The Conversation. Publié : 3 janvier 2025, 15:47 CET.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

- [Yoon Walker](#), [SOAS, University of London](#)

Yoon Walker is a PhD Candidate at SOAS, University of London. Her research focuses on human rights violations during South Korea's authoritarian regime, examining how such practices were institutionalised nationwide under the guise of providing welfare for marginalised populations. In addition to her work on human rights abuses, Yoon's research explores transitional justice in South Korea, with particular attention to the efforts of victims to achieve justice and reclaim their dignity and honour.

- The Conversation is a nonprofit news organization dedicated to helping academic experts share ideas with the public. We can give away our articles thanks to the help of foundations, universities and readers like you. [Donate Now to support research-based journalism](#)