

6. How to create contention: topics, targets, and action forms of anti-LGBT protest

This chapter summarizes the actions of the Korean anti-LGBT movement in the phase of its intensified activity from 2010 until 2020. Owing to the sheer number of protest events during this period, I refrain from giving detailed accounts of what happened in these years. Rather, I focus on the topics of protest to find out which issues in particular represented bones of contention for anti-LGBT activists. I analyze the actors targeted by anti-LGBT protest to ascertain where the conflict is actually situated, and illustrate the forms of action. All of this will help understand the special composition of action repertoires, with traditional protest patterns on the one hand, and specifically argumentative, ‘educational’ war-of-position strategies on the other. This overview also provides the basis for discerning topics that will be analyzed in greater detail in the focus chapters 10–12.

6.1 Topics of protest: fighting pro-LGBT legislation and queer visibility

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, anti-LGBT activism has for a long time been rather sporadic but powerful, focusing on certain incidents and mobilizing accordingly, and – in most cases – preventing effectively many pro-LGBT laws from coming into force. After 2013, anti-LGBT activism has intensified both in terms of the increasing number of supporting social movement organizations (cf. chapter 10), as well as concerning the rising number of protests per year. A further routinization of anti-LGBT activism becomes apparent also in the topics the movement deals with.

Table 3: Main topics of anti-LGBT protest events per year, 2010–2020^a

	Topic	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
General topics	Homosexuality in general	1	-	-	11	9	41	34	21	9	9	-	135
	'Ex-gay'	-	-	-	-	3	9	7	4	3	4	-	30
	'Gender ideology'	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	4	4	2	14
	HIV/AIDS	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	2	1	1	1	9
	'Healing'	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	2	-	8
	Surveys	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	2	-	5
	Transgender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	3	4
Law proposals, ordinances, codification	Anti-Discrimination Law	8	-	-	21	5	9	12	2	-	5	5	67
	NHRCK Act article 2(3)	-	-	-	-	4	8	12	5	1	11	2	43
	Same-sex marriage	-	-	-	4	3	12	8	10	2	-	1	40
	Military Criminal Code article 92(6)	4	2	-	3	6	-	14	7	-	2	-	38
	Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance	-	6	8	1	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	19
	Constitutional amendment (gender equality)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	1	-	-	18
	School textbooks	-	-	-	6	2	1	1	-	-	3	-	13
	National Human Rights Policy Basic Plan (NAP)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	3	-	12
	South Ch'ungch'öng Province Human Rights Ordinance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	6	-	-	12
	Reform of Kyönggi Prov. Gender Equality Ordinance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	1	8
	Seoul Human Rights Charter	-	-	-	-	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	7
	Gender Equality Policy Plan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	1	-	-	6
	South Kyöngsang Province Student HR Ordinance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	-	6
Seoul National University Human Rights Guidelines	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	1	-	-	5	

	Topic	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Anti-LGBT	Seoul Queer Culture Festival	-	-	-	-	5	33	15	4	6	6	6	75
	Taegu Queer Festival	-	-	-	-	2	1	3	2	3	2	-	13
	Embassies support LGBT	-	-	-	-	1	3	4	-	-	1	-	9
Media	Criticizing TV programs etc.	4	2	3	2	4	2	-	3	2	-	-	22
	Hankyoreh reports (e.g., on Esther Prayer Movement)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	7	1	-	10
	Journalistic regulations	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	4
Other	Homosexuality in elections	-	-	-	-	1	-	11	6	3	-	2	23
	Feminist lecture at Hanyang University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4	-	7
	Chongshin University controversy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	5
	Appointment of Supreme Court judge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	5
	Total^b	15	10	16	52	57	116	126	114	75	78	22	693

^a Data for the year 2020 only until the end of April. Except for two cases, topics with less than 5 occurrences have been excluded. ^b Total for all topics (2000–2020), including the topics excluded in this table. The totals equal the numbers of protests per year.

Table 3 depicts per year all the topics of protest events that have come up four or more times from 2010 until 2020, that is, the topics that have been most contentious for the anti-LGBT movement.¹ Some topics only appear at certain points in time, such as the *Seoul Human Rights Charter* in 2014 and 2015, the *South Ch'ungch'öng Province Human Rights Ordinance*, and the controversy over a new proposed definition of 'gender equality' as part of a constitutional amendment in 2017 and 2018.² In fact, as the extensive PEA dataset

- 1 By 'topic', I mean the main focus of the respective protest events. This does not imply that only this main topic is treated or commented on at events. Rather to the contrary, anti-LGBT activists commonly use diverse ways to argue for their purpose, often creating links with categorically unconnected topics, such as invoking the 'threat' of same-sex marriage at many events. Chapters 7 and 8 will analyze the framing strategies of the anti-LGBT movement in greater detail.
- 2 The South Korean constitution states in article 36(1) that "Marriage and family life shall be entered into and sustained on the basis of individual dignity and equality of the sexes, and the State shall do everything in its power to achieve that goal." In the Korean version, the term 'equality of the sexes' actually reads 'equality of both/the two sexes' (*yangsöng p'yöngdüng*). The prefix 'yang' refers to a binary classification. In order to make the constitution consistent with the term 'söngbyöl' (i.e., 'sex' without the binary connotation), the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) proposed to delete this prefix. This was, however, disputed by the anti-LGBT movement, which

shows, there are many topics that come up in anti-LGBT protest events only once (47 topics) or twice (15 topics), revealing the broad positioning of the movement and its increasing zeal and diligence to problematize virtually everything that may be interpreted as being in favor of LGBT rights.

The protest event dataset also exhibits another trend. Some topics develop into issues that the movement focuses on *continuously*. Either the events or law proposals that they oppose keep reappearing on a regular basis such as the Seoul Queer Culture Festival or anti-discrimination bills. Or they are brought up by activists themselves, such as the generic topic of homosexuality,³ or the alleged possibility to ‘heal’ LGBT people so that they become ‘ex-gays’, or the issue of same-sex marriage, which serves as an overarching topic for fearmongering without a concrete law proposal at its basis. Concrete policies figure prominently among the topics that the anti-LGBT movement treats most and on a regular basis. Besides the anti-discrimination law and the worries that same-sex marriage gets legalized, the anti-LGBT movement also increasingly turns to already existing laws. For example, they aim at scrapping the provision for protection against discrimination of LGBT people from the *National Human Rights Commission of Korea Act* and, conversely, strive to keep the criminalization of sex between male soldiers in the *Military Criminal Code*.

Legislative attempts at stipulating equal treatment for LGBT people are generally a main focus of anti-LGBT protests. Of the 112 topics discerned through PEA, 38 deal with bills, ordinances, charters, and other types of regulating pro-LGBT positions through legislative means. These protest events make up 47.2% of the total number of protests (327 of 693) – by far the largest category. Related to this political focus are protest events that actively make homosexuality a topic in elections (23 events) and protests directed against politicians, government officials, and public organizations that support (or are alleged to support) LGBT rights. 38 such protest events have taken place from 2010–2020. In this context, the anti-LGBT movement commonly directs its activities towards eminent people that are appointed for important posts like Supreme Court judges or ministerial positions. Interestingly, also conservative politicians such as Hwang Kyo-ahn and Yoon Suk-yeol (*Yun Sōk-yōl*) gained some attention. While the former’s appointment to become prime minister in 2015 was welcomed by the KACC for his strictly conservative and Christian positions (KACC 2015, June 18), the latter got under fire for his positive stance on LGBT issues. Anti-LGBT groups opposed Yoon’s nomination for the post of prosecutor general in 2019 (Paek Sang-hyōn 2019, July 9). In 2022, Yoon would be elected

alleged that if the term ‘*sōng p’yōngdūng*’ (equality of the sexes) was introduced into the constitution, this would be an expression of ‘gender ideology’, alleging that pro-LGBT legislation could be introduced through the backdoor (cf. e.g., Paek, Sang-hyōn 2017, July 10).

- 3 It is, of course, hardly surprising that ‘homosexuality’ is treated as a central topic of anti-LGBT protests. In this respect, one has to note that the PEA dataset allows for overlaps in the category ‘topic’, i.e., a protest event can both be about a concrete target to fight against such as a human rights ordinance, as well as pointing out the alleged badness of homosexuality as a secondary theme. In most cases, however, I have classified protest events into the category ‘homosexuality in general’ when the clear focus was to speak ill of homosexuality in the narrow sense. This is, for example, the case at seminars, forums, in short, ‘educational’ events that the movement offers on a frequent basis. See on this aspect, i.e., education, chapter 6.3 and chapter 11.

South Korea's president with the support from conservative political forces. Protestant leaders, however, voiced concerns about the presidential candidate Yoon, reproaching him of being involved with shamanism and the *Sinchŏnji* sect, yet without mentioning his alleged pro-LGBT positioning anymore (Na, Su-jin 2022, February 14).

Further opposition is directed at LGBT events, and at those actors supporting these events such as embassies. The queer culture festivals in Seoul and in other cities in particular face counter-protests, constituting 13.1% (104) of all protest events. The anti-LGBT movement seems to disapprove of such outright expressions of the existence and activities of LGBT people and organizations. Visibility of LGBT themes in general is highly problematic in the eyes of anti-LGBT activists, as they also decry films, TV series, and media outlets for displaying homosexuality in neutral or positive ways. Protest events that focus on media critique amount to 5.5% (44) of the total. Pro-LGBT positions also face protest when they appear within the churches themselves. The critique of the *World Council of Churches* has already been treated in chapter 5, but also other instances of intra-church opposition against the overt homophobia in Korean conservative Protestantism have emerged in recent years. Chapter 12 analyzes in greater detail this intricate constellation of counter and counter-counter protest. Some of the church-related protest events, however, also take place in support of, and praising anti-LGBT positionings of Protestant denominations. In 2015, for example, the *Korean Methodist Church* adopted an official stance against homosexuality, and the *Hapdong* denomination of the *Presbyterian Church of Korea* changed its church constitution to explicitly prohibit the promotion of homosexuality in the same year – two examples of concrete institutionalization (i.e., codification) of anti-LGBT positions within the Protestant Right, which were applauded by anti-LGBT actors (Pak, Chi-hun 2016, January 11; KACC 2016, July 19).

Places of protest: the anti-LGBT movement goes local

The PEA data is indicative of another trend. The vast majority, 75.1 percent of protest events took place in Seoul.⁴ This is not surprising, considering that South Korea is a highly centralized state both in terms of political decision-making processes and concerning the concentration of population in the metropolitan area of Seoul – roughly half of the South Korean population, 25 million people, live in the capital city and its agglomeration. After 2013, however, the number of anti-LGBT protest events started to increase also outside Seoul. As the PEA dataset shows, many protests are directed against ordinances on (student) human rights and gender equality, as well as queer festivals on the regional and local levels. Kyōnggi province, the area around the capital city, displays the second-largest number of anti-LGBT protest events after Seoul (24, or 5.7%), followed by the city of Taegu in Southern Korea (22, 5.3%), a politically conservative stronghold. Other traditionally conservative areas also boast slightly higher numbers of protests: Busan (8),

4 The numbers given here refer only to the cases where a place of protest is stated in the Kukmin Daily articles *without* KACC press statements, i.e., 415 out of 693. The 312 protest events in Seoul thus represent 75.1% of 415. The high number of cases where the place is not specified is predominantly due to the high number of (KACC) press statements in the PEA dataset. Press statements normally do not indicate a specific place.

North Kyōngsang (9) and South Kyōngsang (5) provinces. Bigger cities such as Taejōn (8), Kwangju (6), and Inch'ōn (3) also feature some anti-LGBT mobilization. The remaining provinces have all seen at least one protest event.

In this context, the case of the *South Ch'ungch'ōng Province (Ch'unghnam-do) Human Rights Ordinance* is noteworthy. While the PEA data only depicts a total of 5 protest events for this province, the attention the anti-LGBT movement granted to this topic has been bigger. Twelve protest events are recorded to have taken place against this regional ordinance in 2017 and 2018 (cf. Table 3), thus transcending the local level and demonstrating the farther-reaching importance of this conflict. The reason for this is the fact that this ordinance was the first piece of pro-LGBT legislation to be abolished again after massive mobilization from conservative Christian groups – a huge success for the Protestant Right. The Ch'unghnam-do Human Rights Ordinance had been introduced in 2012 in an effort to implement human rights protection rules and institutions similar to the stipulations in the NHRCK Act of 2001 also on the regional level. Other provinces and municipalities passed analogous human rights ordinances in that period. Interestingly, the Ch'unghnam-do Human Rights Ordinance itself did not directly mention 'sexual orientation' or 'gender identity', but in article 5–2 only referred to the anti-discrimination clauses of the NHRCK Act and to the South Korean Constitution. When the majoritarian conservative lawmakers belonging to the Saenuri Party in the provincial assembly voted in favor of abolishing the ordinance on 2 February 2018, representatives of the Protestant Right triumphantly declared that this could also have effects on similar bills in other places. A Kukmin Daily journalist writes: "The case is expected to be a catalyst for the abolition of the Human Rights Ordinances promoting and advocating for homosexuality enacted in 103 municipalities and the revision of the National Human Rights Commission Act" (Paek, Sang-hyōn 2018, February 5). In fact, several localities followed the example of South Ch'ungch'ōng Province. In April 2018, for example, the county of Chūngpyōng in North Ch'ungch'ōng Province scrapped its human rights ordinance (Paek, Sang-hyōn 2018, April 24), as did the city of Kyeryong in early May of that same year, where an activist claimed that the ordinance was passed to support "bad human rights education" on homosexuality and same-sex marriage and was allegedly geared "to create jobs for left-wing activists" (Paek Sang-hyōn 2018, May 2).

The contention surrounding the South Ch'ungch'ōng Province Human Rights Ordinance indeed showcases how the fight for and against the rights of LGBT people has increasingly become political in the narrow sense. When the local and regional elections in June 2018 ended with a landslide victory for the Democratic Party nationwide, the assembly of South Ch'ungch'ōng Province also changed towards a large liberal majority. This resulted in the reenactment of the Human Rights Ordinance in September 2018, only a few months after it had been abolished (Yi Chun-ho 2018, September 14). The issue of homosexuality has thus become a 'hot potato' for both political camps, also on the regional and local levels. Chapter 10.5 will deal with this politicization of LGBT themes in greater detail.

Expansion in content-related and geographical terms

In summary, the anti-LGBT movement treats diverse topics, most of which belong to the broad category of fighting against (alleged) pro-LGBT legislation. The movement also increasingly focuses its activities on concrete LGBT events and on media coverage about LGBT issues, which they decry and try to prevent. Apparently, anti-LGBT activists regard queer visibility – if realized in a benevolent and advocacy fashion – as a problem, alongside the codification of LGBT rights in the policy-making process. Some topics become continuous targets of anti-LGBT activism like the fight against same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination laws, and queer festivals in Seoul and Taegu. Then again, the focus on other themes remains short-lived and singular. This is also due to the expansion of the movement. After 2013, the number of protest events beyond Seoul has been rising. The anti-LGBT movement becomes more attentive and thorough in what it is doing, starting fights against anything that even remotely gives the impression of being pro-LGBT. In this process, anti-LGBT activists identify diverse opponents. These targets of activism are the focus of the following subchapter.

6.2 Targets of protest: attacking the political sphere, the LGBT movement, and others

Similar to the analysis in the previous subchapter, the main targets of the anti-LGBT movement fall into two main categories representing the lion's share of the opposed actors: first, the governmental and the political sphere in the broad sense, which supports – or is perceived to support – the LGBT community and pro-LGBT bills, and second, the LGBT movement itself. As Table 4 shows, a total of 576 instances of targeting opponents was identified in the PEA dataset. Of these, by far the largest part consists of institutions related to governing bodies (44.8%), including representative bodies like the national and provincial assemblies and city councils. If we go beyond this governmental sphere and consider also political parties, as well as individual politicians and public officials or candidates for public and political posts, the accumulated targets within the governmental and political arena make up almost two thirds of the total (64.5%). By contrast, the LGBT movement only occupies 12.2 percent of all instances of targeted actors. In this category, queer culture festivals are the main targets (52 out of 70), leaving only a very low number of specific LGBT rights groups targeted as objects of opposition.

Of course, it is difficult to differentiate between pro-LGBT activism on the one side, and pro-LGBT legislation and the political structures attempting to realize such policies on the other. Without LGBT activists fighting for their rights in the first place, presumably none of the proposed bills would have seen the light of day. It is also not surprising that the anti-LGBT movement attacks institutions that promote the law proposals, ordinances, and charters that are perceived as highly problematic in terms of their (alleged) support for LGBT rights, as the previous section demonstrated. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea in particular faces a great amount of opposition, as do politicians belonging to the Democratic Party of Korea such as Seoul's former mayor Park Won-soon and former president Moon Jae-in. However, as chapter 10.5 will show,

the divide between the major liberal and conservative political parties in Korea is not so clear-cut. There are, for example, also several politicians from the Democratic Party actively supporting the anti-LGBT movement. Conversely, national-level government institutions have provided partial support for LGBT topics also under the conservative Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations.

Be that as it may, the large share of opposition directed against the political sphere is noteworthy. This bias suggests that the Korean anti-LGBT movement has a clearly political orientation. Anti-LGBT activism does not only take place on the religious and social levels; it is also, and importantly so, played out in the political arena. It seems that the anti-LGBT movement finds its main opponent in the political sphere rather than reacting to the Korean LGBT rights movement, given the scant attention directed towards the latter. In this context, it would therefore be wrong to call anti-LGBT collective action a direct countermovement of the LGBT movement (cf. Meyer & Staggenborg 1996).

Table 4: Frequencies of targets of anti-LGBT activism, 2000–2020^a

TARGETS	N	PERCENT (%)
Government, public institution, representative body	258	44.8
National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK)	93	16.1
National Assembly	23	4.0
Seoul Metropolitan Government	20	3.5
Ministry of Education	13	2.3
National Government	10	1.7
Ministry of Gender Equality and Family	10	1.7
Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education	10	1.7
Ministry of Justice	9	1.5
LGBT movement	70	12.2
Queer culture festivals	52	9.0
Seoul Queer Culture Festival	34	5.9
Public representative or candidate for a public position	66	11.5
Seoul mayor Park Won-soon	30	5.2
President Moon Jae-in	7	1.2
Political party or party politician	43	7.5
Democratic Party	11	1.9
Lawmakers supporting homosexuality/pro-LGBT bills	10	1.7
Media, TV station, newspaper	43	7.5
Munhwa Broadcasting Company (MBC, TV station)	9	1.5
Hankyoreh (newspaper)	9	1.5
Korean Broadcasting System (KBS, TV station)	7	1.2
Judiciary branch	38	6.6
Constitutional Court	14	2.4
Church association or denomination, individual church or pastor	21	3.6
National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK)	5	0.9

TARGETS	N	PERCENT (%)
Private person	10	1.7
University or other educational institution	8	1.4
Company	3	0.5
Other	16	1.4
Embassies or ambassadors supporting queer festivals	6	1.0
TOTAL	576^b	100,0^b

Note: Overarching categories are presented in bold. The most frequent sub-cases of these categories are listed below these categories. ^a The data for the year 2020 only includes the months January–April. ^b Within the overall 693 protest events, 576 targets could be identified, which serve as the total in this table. The total refers to the numbers in bold, i.e., the overarching categories.

When asked who the biggest opponent of the anti-LGBT movement in Korea was, one anti-LGBT activist replied that only “on the surface” it was the gay rights movement. The actual opponent consisted of “forces that want to destroy the nation”, groups that “instigate social chaos” and “make society confused” (Interview 7). This statement is telling, since it shows that the fight against LGBT issues is embedded in a bigger framework. Homosexuality is regarded as an element of ‘confusion’ that is purported to be used by inimical forces to harm the nation. The interviewee attributes the need to protect the nation to Korea’s geopolitical situation, the country still being at war. While resisting to get into the details, it becomes clear that the anti-LGBT activist talks about the truce with North Korea, thus alleging the threat that communism poses to South Korea. As chapters 7 and 8 will demonstrate, such views are frequently vindicated in anti-LGBT activism. The Protestant Right creates a ‘red scare’, claiming that people leaning to the political left support, or collaborate with North Korea, and by extension, also espouse topics such as LGBT rights. The interviewed anti-LGBT activist also holds this opinion. “I do not know if it is a coincidence, but there are a lot of people following it [i.e., North Korea] who advocate homosexuality” (Interview 7).

This larger political agenda may explain the dominant focus of the Korean anti-LGBT movement on political targets. Successfully influencing political parties, lawmakers, and institutions such as ministries and government agencies in a way that they refrain from supporting LGBT rights is a steppingstone for increased political leverage. I am not claiming here that LGBT issues *only* serve as a pretext for actually attaining larger political goals. The frame analysis in chapters 7 and 8 shows that the opposition against homosexuality does have a solid, mostly religiously based, ideological foundation. In addition to this, however, I argue that the Protestant Right *also* engages in anti-LGBT activism to implement a specific, comprehensive socio-political and religious agenda in Korea.

Rather than being a countermovement to LGBT activism, the anti-LGBT movement can be considered an “opposing movement” (Dugan 2004), a movement that did not emerge directly in reaction to another movement, but one that holds opposing positions against a certain topic and therefore competes with other actors for political influence.

However, the Protestant Right's larger socio-political outlook complicates this constellation since it does not merely act as a *challenger* to the state as suggested by the *contentious politics research agenda* (cf. McAdam et al. 2001), the state being defined as the government and the institutions exerting power. In a sense, it is also a *member* of the state, considering its traditionally strong representation in, and its ties with the political sphere (cf. chapter 3.2). This is especially the case in times of conservative rule. And it is in contrast to the LGBT movement, which does not have such 'natural' allies at the state level. For the Protestant Right, attacking state institutions is thus an ambivalent and potentially risky undertaking, especially when these institutions are controlled by conservative governments. The partisan divide is therefore still very much present also in the targets of anti-LGBT activism. Both on the national and local levels, the ministries and lawmakers attacked mostly belong to the Democratic Party. The NHRCK is a special case in this context, since it is officially an independent organization working according to a specific mandate. However, it is also commonly considered a political project of the political left since it was established under the Kim Dae-Jung administration in 2001. Through the years, the NHRCK has consistently called attention to human rights abuses against LGBT people irrespective of the political leaning of the national government in power. Therefore, the NHRCK has been a continuous target for the anti-LGBT movement.

The political divide also reaches beyond the strictly political arena. As the interview with the anti-LGBT activist quoted above shows, anything and anyone associated with left-wing politics and their alleged pro-North Korea stances becomes problematized. The judiciary, as well as the media world and non-aligned church associations are affected by smear campaigns. When, for example, the Moon Jae-in government appointed Kim Myōng-su as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Protestant Right criticized Kim for his "progressive bias" and his pro-LGBT positions (KACC 2017, September 11). The progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh* is also frequently slammed for its reports boasting allegedly anti-Christian and pro-LGBT attitudes. Conflict even enters Protestantism itself when actors from within espouse LGBT rights or criticize the Protestant Right's uncompromising hostility against LGBT people. As chapter 12 will explore, the progressive church association NCKK, the Christian online newspaper *Newsjoy*, and pro-LGBT pastors, among others, face fierce backlash when they openly show progressive views.

Anti-LGBT contention is thus played out on many different levels: in the traditional institutionalized political arena, through non-traditional activist means, in the judiciary, in educational contexts, in the media, and within Protestantism. These sites of contention are also reflected in the actors targeted by the anti-LGBT movement. This and the previous sections have sought to find out what the conflicts are actually about, and between whom the contention takes place. The next section focuses on the question of how exactly contention gets enacted, describing the action forms and participation levels of anti-LGBT collective action.

6.3 Forms of protest: a ‘war of position’ with increasing participation

The definition of ‘protest’ employed in this study is a broad one. It does not only cover traditional forms of protest such as rallies, petitions, boycotts, and violent means of protest, but also includes other means to create attention and ideally change people’s attitudes towards the issue in question. The PEA dataset shows that communicating anti-LGBT content is in fact a predominant activity of the Korean anti-LGBT movement. Of all the action forms used by anti-LGBT activism, press conferences and press releases represent by far the largest activist method, constituting 44.7% of all instances of action forms as depicted in Table 5. Press releases are a relatively cost-effective means to make oneself heard and, if successfully dispersed, have the potential to be covered by diverse media outlets. When such press releases are combined with press conferences held in locations close to one’s opponents headquarters or offices, as is often the case, this action form can prove even more fruitful. Press conferences with banners in front the National Assembly building or the NHRCK headquarters, for example, create powerful images and make the conflict more concrete. Educational events, which make up the second-largest share of action forms (14.7%), have a similar objective as press releases, that is, communicating one’s contents to the larger public. However, seminars and forums on anti-LGBT topics generally have a broader focus, they feature ‘expert’ input, and are aimed at a more specific public, mostly Christians. Chapter 11 will delve into the details of the media and education-related activities of the anti-LGBT movement, also covering its activities on social media platforms – aspects on which the PEA dataset lacks information.

Traditional forms of protest like rallies, as well as petitions and signature collection campaigns come in third (13.6%) and fourth places (7.2%). Other common action forms such as disturbances, demonstrations marches, sending messages to politicians (by e-mail or fax), symbolic forms of protest, and scuffles are of minor importance quantitatively, each appearing less than ten times in the PEA dataset. The use of violence in scuffles and brawls with the police and/or opponent protesters, however, represents a concern for the movement leadership. After the clashes at the Seoul Queer Culture Festival in 2014, Protestant groups such as CCK, CCIK, and KACC issued an advisory note ahead of the counter-rally against the SQCF’s 2015 edition, calling for the avoidance of physical violence and overt hatred since the resulting negative media coverage “would just strengthen the position of homosexuals” (cited in Yu, Yŏng-dae 2015, June 4).

Table 5: Action forms of anti-LGBT activism, 2000–2020^a

ACTION FORM	N	PERCENT out of all instances of action forms (807)	PERCENT out of all protest events (693)
Press conference, press release ^b	361	44.7	52.1
Educational event, forum, seminar	119	14.7	17.2
Rally, protest, assembly	110	13.6	15.9

ACTION FORM	N	PERCENT out of all instances of action forms (807)	PERCENT out of all protest events (693)
Petition, collection of signatures	58	7.2	8.4
Strategic, emergency, or preparatory meeting	51	6.3	7.6
Meeting with politicians	25	3.1	3.6
Prayer meeting, worship, service	19	2.4	2.7
Production and distribution of leaflets, booklets	12	1.5	1.7
Disturbance, hindrance, boycott	8	1.0	1.1
Repressive measure (e.g. heresy trials against pro-LGBT pastors)	8	1.0	1.1
Sending e-mails, faxes, text messages to politicians	6	0.7	0.9
Demonstration march	5	0.6	0.7
Scuffle, brawl	5	0.6	0.7
Litigation	4	0.5	0.6
Survey produced by anti-LGBT organization	3	0.4	0.4
Non-verbal, symbolic protest (e.g., shaving off one's hair)	3	0.4	0.4
Other ^c	8	1.0	1.1
TOTAL	807^d	100.0	100.0

^a The data for the year 2020 only covers the months January–April. ^b The PEA dataset has a certain bias towards press releases since the data of the KACC only consists of such. But even without the 180 KACC press releases this action form would constitute the largest category. ^c The category ‘other’ includes action forms occurring less than three times: defamation, procedural complaints, mission and evangelization, and sending questionnaires to politicians and/or creating an index on them. ^d The total number of action forms is higher than the total number of protest events (693) since more than one action form can occur at one protest event.

The leaders of the anti-LGBT movement are very intent on creating a favorable image of their activism, but also on acting effectively. For this purpose, they frequently hold meetings to prepare important events such as the counter-rallies against queer festivals. The leaders also gather to plan the movement’s short-term tactics and long-term strategy while also being able to act promptly, which is apparent in emergency meetings convened on short notice. A number of leading figures play a central role in the movement, as chapter 10 will demonstrate. They do not only take part in press conferences, rallies, and leadership gatherings on a regular basis, but also often meet politicians and public officials, either to advance their views or to show their disapproval about certain positions and policies supported by these political figures (cf. chapter 10.5). While leadership gatherings and meetings with politicians do not fall under the category of traditional protest events, they serve the important purpose of visibility for anti-LGBT positions both within Protestant confines as well as in the political arena.

What may come as a surprise is the relative absence of exclusively religious action forms. Prayer meetings and similar religious events with an anti-LGBT focus only represent a small share of the overall action forms used (2.4% of all instances). Yet, expressions of Christian faith are present as supplementary items on the agenda at many protest events. Participants at rallies pray together, presenters on the stage fall into sermon-like speeches at seminars and frequently use religious arguments to support their points (cf. also chapter 11). Repressive measures also form part of the religious action repertoires. Chapter 12 will show how Protestant denominations use the accusation of heresy to punish pro-LGBT pastors. There are also explicitly non-religious action forms such as litigation where anti-LGBT actors use the judicial structures of the secular state to reach their goals. The anti-LGBT movement has also commissioned some surveys on the topic of homosexuality to produce public opinion data undergirding their perspectives. The analysis of the movement's framing efforts in chapter 8.3 will further develop the aspects of 'scientific' knowledge and secular argumentative strategies.

The framing strategies are important to understand the 'war of position' strategy of the anti-LGBT movement. However, already a look at the action forms used is instructive in this respect. Be it the press statements, the 'educational' events, or the production of surveys, a major part of the activities is geared towards changing the ideas and attitudes that media actors and the general public – and in fact also conservative Christians – have on LGBT-related themes. As I have argued before, anti-LGBT activism is centrally implemented as a communicative 'war of position' to win the cultural hegemony first, in order to then also be able to seize and stabilize political power. The data on the action forms of the movement supports this argument. The exact ways the movement goes about this Gramsci-inspired 'cultural war' will be treated in the following chapters.

Increasing mobilization of the anti-LGBT movement

Movements choose their action forms based on hopes for causing large mediatic and, by extension, societal and political repercussions. One important variable to achieve this objective is the number of participants in a specific protest event. The PEA dataset provides information on this aspect for the mobilized individuals in concrete protests and rallies, for petitions and similar signature collection campaigns,⁵ and for the total number of established groups that organized and/or participated in protest events. Table 6 exhibits condensed data for four pooled periods. One needs to keep in mind, however, that the accuracy of the numbers given may be questionable since activists tend to exaggerate the number of protest participants to create an image of broad support for their causes. The measure of the median shall balance the risk of potentially excessive claims in this respect.⁶

5 Comments on online bulletin boards of governmental websites also fall under this category. The anti-LGBT movement frequently calls to get active on such participatory portals to express one's disapproval of pro-LGBT law proposals.

6 The median is a statistical measure to indicate the middle number in a row of values. In contrast, the arithmetic mean has the risk of suggesting high average participation when there are very high outliers. The combination of the two measures shall provide a robust overview of the mobilization potential of anti-LGBT activism. Note: in Table 6, the median cases sometimes exhibit several cor-

As for the participation in rallies and other types of protest gatherings there is a clearly increasing tendency. While the numbers for the period 2000–2010 are not very informative owing to the scant overall amount of protest events, the following periods feature a rising trend that is supported by both median and arithmetic mean. In the period 2011–2013, an average of 341 people (median: 100) participated in protests, while this number stood at 1,975 (median: 220) for 2014–2016, and 5,172 (median: 500) in 2017–2020. The biggest protest event in terms of mobilization drew 50,000 participants to the rally against the Seoul Queer Culture Festival in 2019 according to Kukmin Daily. The median, however, indicates that protest participation only seldomly reaches such high numbers and is generally significantly lower, but with an increasing trend over the years.

Table 6: Mobilization of the anti-LGBT movement, 2000–2020

Years	Measures	Participants at protest events (N)	Corresponding topics (code)	Participants in signature campaigns etc. (N)	Corresponding topics (code)	Participating/organizing groups (N)	Corresponding topics (code)
2000–2010	Minimum	120	1	2,233	3	1	4, 5
	Median	-	-	5,000	1	4	1, 2, 6
	Arith. mean	160	n/a	42,411	n/a	4.4	n/a
	Maximum	200	2	120,000	1	12	2
2011–2013	Minimum	50	7	54,000	1	4	1, 2, 6, 8
	Median	100	1, 7	100,000	1	30	1, 7
	Arith. mean	341.3	n/a	96,666.7	n/a	214	n/a
	Maximum	800	7	136,000	7	3,000	1
2014–2016	Minimum	10	6	11,000	9	10	6, 8, 12
	Median	220	3	34,312	10	60	3
	Arith. mean	1,975.6	n/a	58,675.9	n/a	115.8	n/a
	Maximum	20,000	2	100,000	11	1,568	2

responding topics. This is because the median number of participants sometimes appears more than once. This also applies to the remaining measures, except for the arithmetic mean, which, of course, cannot have a corresponding topic.

Years	Measures	Participants at protest events (N)	Corresponding topics (code)	Participants in signature campaigns etc. (N)	Corresponding topics (code)	Participating/organizing groups (N)	Corresponding topics (code)
2017 – 2020	Minimum	9	2	2,204	18	6	3, 19
	Median	500	14, 16, 17	75,770	15	39	20
	Arith. mean	5,172	n/a	185,596	n/a	104.5	n/a
	Maximum	50,000	9	1,100,000	1, 11, 13	400	13

Topic codes: **1** = Anti-discrimination law; **2** = homosexuality in general; **3** = Military Criminal Code §92(6); **4** = Youth Protection Act; **5** = Criticizing foreign church for pro-LGBT stance; **6** = Homosexuality in school textbooks; **7** = Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance; **8** = Against depiction of LGBT topics in movies, series etc.; **9** = Seoul Queer Culture Festival; **10** = Seoul Human Rights Charter; **11** = Same-sex marriage; **12** = 'ex-gay'; **13** = NHRCK Act §2(3); **14** = Multiculture Ordinance of Puch'ŏn city; **15** = Taegu Queer Culture Festival; **16** = AIDS; **17** = Against nomination of Kim Myŏng-su as Supreme Court judge; **18** = Constitutional amendment (on 'gender equality'); **19** = transition surgeries for trans people; **20** = Amendment of Kyŏnggi Province Gender Equality Ordinance.

Compared to the participants in concrete protests, the numbers of signatures for petitions are significantly higher throughout. The readiness to take to the streets seems to be lower than the willingness to sign a petition or write an anonymous online comment on a governmental bulletin board. This category has shown higher values from the beginning, yet, without showing a clear upwards trend. The maximum numbers of signatures for the respective campaigns are impressive, though. Already in 2007, 120,000 signatures were collected against the Anti-Discrimination Law, followed by 136,000 signatures against the Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance in 2012, and 100,000 people who signed a petition against same-sex marriage in 2015. The anti-LGBT movement achieved the highest number of signatures in a broad campaign in 2020, which was directed against the anti-discrimination law, same-sex marriage, and the 'sexual orientation' clause in the NHRCK Act, reaching more than 1 million people.

The third category of quantifiable participation in protest events refers to organized collective actors. The groups within this category organize, or participate in a given protest event, or – as is mostly the case – they support and cosign a public declaration or (press) statement. The numbers given here have to be treated with caution, though. As chapter 10 will demonstrate, not all of these groups are active members of the anti-LGBT movement. In fact, there are only a few ones that can be called a social movement organization (SMO), that is, groups that actively, frequently, and continuously engage in the fight against LGBT rights. Many organizations that appear in the lists of undersigning groups seem to be token participants, since they are only listed without ever being mentioned anywhere else in Kukmin Daily reports on anti-LGBT activism.⁷ Kukmin

7 In a non-systematic Google and Naver (a South Korean search engine) search of groups frequently appearing on those lists, I found that no other data than the mentioning in the lists could be found

Daily also commonly refers to the undersigning groups as ‘church and civic groups’ (*kyogye mit simin tanch’ŏ*). A closer look, however, reveals that the vast majority of these groups are in fact related to Protestantism, and to a minor extent to other Christian faiths.⁸ The reference to ‘civic groups’ has the apparent aim of making the general public believe that also non-Christian, secular groups are part of the fight. Several anti-LGBT groups have indeed names that conceal their activists’ Christian background, such as the *People’s Solidarity for a Healthy Society* (*kŏn’ganghan sahoe-rŭl wihan kungmin yŏndae*), the *Korean Sexology Research Association* (*han’guk sŏnggwahak yŏn’gu hyŏphoe*), or the *Solidarity Movement against Homosexuality* (*tongsŏngae pandae undong yŏndae*).

The average number of groups and organizations taking part in anti-LGBT protest events has risen, with the median showing a peak in the period 2014–2016, but going down again 2017–2020. The arithmetic mean exhibits a peak in the period 2011–2013. This is due to an outlier, namely 3,000 Protestant churches in Inch’ŏn Metropolitan City collectively joining the forces to fight against the Anti-Discrimination Law in 2013. Another relative outlier occurred in 2015, when 1,568 churches in Taegu Metropolitan City supported and held a congress against the promotion of homosexuality in the context of the Taegu Queer Culture Festival. The maximum number of groups involved in a protest event in the period 2017–2020 is 400, being part of a coalition fighting for the deletion of the category ‘sexual orientation’ in the NHRCK Act’s anti-discrimination stipulations.

In conclusion, the mobilization potential of the Korean anti-LGBT movement is high, bringing together 10,000 and more people at concrete protest events 11 times from 2014 until 2020. The majority of protests, however, attracts far less participants. If then considering that sympathetic media like Kukmin Daily may be reticent to report low numbers of participation, there could be a bias towards higher participant numbers. Moreover, the overall number of protest events, which feature data on participation in concrete protests and signature campaigns is rather low (2011–2013: 11 out of 49; 2014–2016: 37 out of 217; 2017–2020: 56 out of 228). Be that as it may, the anti-LGBT movement mobilizes effectively, particularly regarding the numbers of signatures that activists were able to collect in diverse campaigns over the years. A number of questions remains unanswered, though. For example, who exactly are the individual participants, what is their background? Are they mostly Christians or does the movement also reach other crowds? What role do the participants play for the general lineup of the anti-LGBT movement, taking into account the prominent position of a rather small group of movement leaders (cf. chapter 10)? Chapter 9 will elaborate on the concrete people mobilized and give some preliminary answers to the questions just posed.

To persuade people to be mobilized at all for a specific socio-political issue, however, alluring and inventive argumentative strategies are necessary. This study addresses this

on the Internet in the case of several groups, begging the question whether they exist at all. I am, however, lacking the time-related and financial resources to actually delve further into this investigation, which would perhaps be a journalistic one to fulfill. What is definitely true is that only a rather low number of the groups appearing in these lists is consistently and systematically active in anti-LGBT activities.

8 The list of groups produced through PEA reveals that already the names of the groups (including terms like ‘Christian’, ‘church’, ‘holy’, ‘mission’ or ‘ministry’) show their clearly Christian orientation. 156 (or 52.7%) of the total of 296 groups included such Christian or religious references.

crucial movement task by analyzing and categorizing the frames used by anti-LGBT activists. The following chapters thus investigate the ideological or ideational level of movement activities, bringing light into what I refer to as the 'war of position' strategy of the Korean anti-LGBT movement.

