Section 2: Making LGBT issues contentious: development, targets, and framing strategies of Korean anti-LGBT activism in the light of dynamic continuity and opposing desires

When I asked an anti-LGBT activist in one of my research interviews how exactly the Korean anti-LGBT movement approached its socio-political struggles, the activist quoted the *First Epistle to Timothy* (6:12) from the Bible: "Fight the good fight of faith." It is not enough, however, to only bear good witness towards God, the activist added. "You also have to direct it to the world" (Interview no. 7).[1]

At an event celebrating a court decision denying homosexual couples to get married in Korea, another anti-LGBT activist, Yi Su-jin, representative of the *School Parents' Association for Health and Family Affairs* (*kŏn'gang-gwa kajŏng-ŭl wihan hakpumo yŏnhap*), expressed her strong opposition against any attempts at introducing same-sex marriage in Korea. She denounced the opponents' strategies by saying that "homosexuals are suing for the legalization of same-sex marriage with the image of the weak and the victim", and added what she thinks the anti-LGBT movement should achieve: "It is important to win in the court, but we should also win the cultural war" (cited in Paek, Sang-hyŏn 2016, June 8).

These two quotes reveal the broad visions of the Korean anti-LGBT movement. The two activists argue that the fight they engage in is an explicitly religious one. Yet, this fight is not restricted to the religious realm in the strict sense. Rather, their messages also need to be carried to publics beyond the confines of Christianity, that is, into the secular world, into other parts of society. Yi Su-jin claims that concrete success stories, for example winning a lawsuit to prevent same-sex-marriage, are crucial in their overall activities. What is even more important, however, is to prevail in a full-fledged "cultural

1 Translations from the originally Korean quotes, either from research interviews or from articles cited, are my own, unless indicated differently. Since I use a lot of originally Korean textual material, I refrain from mentioning every time that the quotes presented in this study are my own translations.

war" (*munhwa chŏnjaeng*). This strong wording bespeaks the significance and urgency of their fight and indicates the readiness of the movement to drastic action. One may wonder, however, what this 'cultural war' is actually about. Is it the fight of the anti-LGBT movement versus advocates of LGBT rights? Is it the volition for Christianity to gain the upper hand over other religions and society at large? Is it a clash of cultures in the geopolitical sense (Huntington 1996)? Or is it comparable to the 'cultural wars' over gender, race, religion, and education ongoing in the United States since the 1980s (Hartman 2015)?

The purpose of this section is to provide a systematic overview of the actions of the Korean anti-LGBT movement – the development, concrete action forms, and framings of their activism – in order to gain a better understanding of the particular 'cultural war' that these parts of conservative Korean Protestantism engage in. The section addresses this study's main research question: why and how do parts of Korean Protestantism make homosexuality a contentious issue? The section will also offer partial answers to supplementary research questions: How did the activism change over time in terms of framing, action repertoires, and overall tactics? What roles do the historical and ideological backgrounds as well as the embeddedness in Protestantism play for the anti-LGBT movement? By using descriptive statistics to analyze the data collected through Protest Event Analysis (PEA), this section covers basic insights and general trends concerning Korean anti-LGBT activism. The analysis is complemented by further sources such as newspaper articles as well as data from qualitative interviews. This section thus sets the stage for the following analytical chapters and sub-case studies, which focus in detail on certain aspects and missing links derived from this section's analyses.

This section proffers three main arguments. First, I analyze what has above been referred to as 'cultural war' as *struggles over hegemony*. In his strategic political thinking, Antonio Gramsci laid the foundation for a broadly conceived understanding of power, which, he argues, can only be safely achieved when sustainably winning the hearts and minds of people. People have to be convinced of the rightfulness of rule and – more importantly – whole-heartedly support and champion the ideological positions promoted by those in power or those who strive to get there. The latter enter counter-hegemonic struggles, of which the lion's share consists of a 'war of position', that is, endeavors to change people's conscience, moral attitudes, and ideological thinking – or in Gramscian terminology, to change their *common sense*. This study shows that the Protestant Right actively engages in such a counter-hegemonic fight. The anti-LGBT movement has an explicitly political focus when, for instance, obstructing pro-LGBT legislation, and attacking politicians and government institutions that promote such laws. Conservative Protestant actors prove to be a considerable counter-hegemonic force, and, at that, an outspokenly political one. This distinct political agenda is backed by a 'war of position' strategy. As will be demonstrated, large parts of the movement's activities comprise communicative and educational action. Different framing strategies are employed depending on the publics addressed.

The second argument this section wants to make concerns the frames used by movement actors. Frames figure as the central means to persuade people of new ideas, to change their attitudes and behavior, and to mobilize them for collective action. A central observation of this study is that part of the framing efforts of the anti-LGBT movement are performed in a dynamic, yet continuous way. *Dynamic continuity*, as presented

in this section, involves three aspects. First, the redeployment of old frames that are combined with new elements in a *bricolage* fashion, most prominently the melding together of anti-communism with anti-LGBT stances. Second, we can observe framing contests and frame diffusion across ideological borders. Specifically, the anti-LGBT movement reframes elements originally used by its direct opponents, i.e., pro-LGBT forces, such as frames related to love and human rights. Diffusion also happens among ideologically compatible actors on a transnational scale. Third, on the level of *collective identity*, this section demonstrates how the anti-LGBT movement tries to resurrect hostility towards homosexuality as a central identity marker of current and potential adherents. Regarding the Christian context, anti-LGBT activists explicitly turn to religious resources by accentuating conservative interpretations of Biblical texts to vilify homosexuality – a topic that, as I will show, has for a long time been largely disregarded in Korean Christianity. The anti-LGBT movement does not only work towards such an identity shift within the Protestant community, though. In order to convince and mobilize other publics as well, the movement uses 'secular' frames that resonate with non-religious crowds. Put differently, in a Gramscian way, anti-LGBT activists attempt making hostility towards LGBT issues a part of the general *common sense* and, for practical activist purposes, have come to use it as a newly established master frame. I argue that these attempts at identity shift have proven successful for conservative Protestant believers, but less so vis-à-vis the general public.

The final line of argument in this section is related to *opposing desires* within the framing strategies of the anti-LGBT movement. This argument is connected with the previous one in the sense that the movement needs to juggle between different publics it wants to reach and between different framing strategies, especially in terms of counter-framing. When borrowing and redeploying frames from opponents on topics such as human rights, love, and victimhood, activists have to make sure that the overall image they propagate remains consistent within their particular system of ideas, norms, and beliefs. The opposing desires evoked in chapter 8 oscillate between religious and non-religious/'secular' framing strategies, between a radicalization of rhetoric while pretending to be moderate and non-violent, and between claims of victimhood on the one hand, and assertions that the anti-LGBT movement represents the societal majority and majoritarian opinions on the other. Such opposing, at times seemingly contradictory framing strategies also exist in socio-political fights over rights, privileges, and recognition – or the refusal to grant these rights to certain groups of people. It is a type of identity work that vilifies others, that creates new boundaries between 'us' and 'them' and designates the in-group as a special, 'chosen' force safeguarding what is 'good' and 'sensible'. In so doing, the anti-LGBT movement creates an external enemy necessary to close the ranks internally (Han, Ch'ae-yun 2017). Ultimately, constructing external enemies serves to mobilize resistance also beyond Protestant confines, pursuing an agenda – a 'cultural war' – that, while having anti-LGBT activism at its core, aspires to greater influence and power in politics and society at large. As I demonstrate in this section, the mechanisms present in these hegemonic struggles contribute to many of the established findings in social scientific research on anti-LGBT political action worldwide. This section will also, however, discern some of the Korean particularities to be found in the action forms, and especially, in the framing strategies of the Protestant Right.

The section proceeds in four steps to approach the arguments just outlined. Chapter 5 encompasses an overview of how LGBT topics have been regarded and dealt with in Korean Protestantism. It starts off with an analysis of the conservative Christian newspaper *Kukmin Daily's* coverage on the topic of homosexuality to find that – unlike other parts of the world at that time – there was relative inattention to LGBT issues in the 1990s and early 2000s. From around 2003 onwards, the orientation of the newspaper's coverage changes, acquiring a more negative stance towards homosexuality. It is also in this phase that concrete activism against LGBT rights starts. Anti-LGBT activism, just as media coverage, intensifies on a large scale after 2013, gets consolidated and becomes a common feature of the Protestant Right's socio-political activities. After this historical overview, chapter 6 zooms into the concrete activities of the anti-LGBT movement, focusing on the topics of protest, the organizations and individuals targeted, and the action forms used in the respective contentious episodes. The movement's framing strategies are covered in chapters 7 and 8, analyzing core mechanisms such as attribution of threat, bricolage, radicalization, boundary work, identity shift, as well as several kinds of frame alignment processes. The section closes with a discussion of its research results and of the effectiveness of the movement's activities over the past years in chapter 9.

5. Development of the Korean anti-LGBT movement and media coverage critical of LGBT issues

This study argues that the Korean anti-LGBT movement acts as part of the Protestant Right, which in turn belongs to the conservative historical bloc of South Korea (cf. chapter 3.2). In contrast to similarly oriented conservative and Christian actors in other parts of the world, the topic of non-heterosexual sexual orientations and non-cis gender identities has only been 'discovered' at a relatively late point in time in Korea. For instance, organized collective action against LGBT rights emerged as early as in the 1970s in the United States, fighting against the decriminalization of same-sex practices and anti-discrimination initiatives, and later also taking action against the support for HIV/AIDS patients, and against attempts at legalizing same-sex marriage (Fejes 2008; Herman 1997). This – mostly Christian – anti-LGBT movement was motivated to get active in reaction to intensified LGBT rights activism that emerged around that time, notably in the years and decades after the initial spark of the Stonewall riots in 1969.[1]

The LGBT movement in Korea was established from the mid-1990s onwards (Bong 2009). The forces opposing LGBT rights only emerged in the mid-2000s and really gained traction starting in 2013/2014, as this chapter will show. Queer people in South Korea did not have a Stonewall moment. Mobilization and socio-political organizing only started after the end of the repressive military regimes that had not left any space for minority rights whatsoever. And also after democratization, LGBT individuals, as well as their activism remained largely invisible in Korea, owing to fear of social repercussions in a societal environment marked by strong heteronormative familism (Johannemann 2021; cf. also Chang 2010). Writing in the early 2000s, gay activist and scholar Seo Dong-jin (2001, 67) states that in Korea, homosexuals "do not exist as a significant social reality." Since then, this has definitely changed, with queer festivals and pride parades growing

1 The Stonewall riots emerged spontaneously on June 28, 1969, in the Stonewall Inn in New York's Christopher Street, fighting against police raids that were commonly performed at gay and lesbian bars in the 1960s. This uprising is considered a watershed moment for the US gay liberation movement (Carter 2004) and has also influenced and inspired LGBT movements elsewhere, e.g., in the Netherlands and in Belgium (Dupont 2021), Denmark (Shield 2020), Germany and elsewhere (Griffiths 2019).

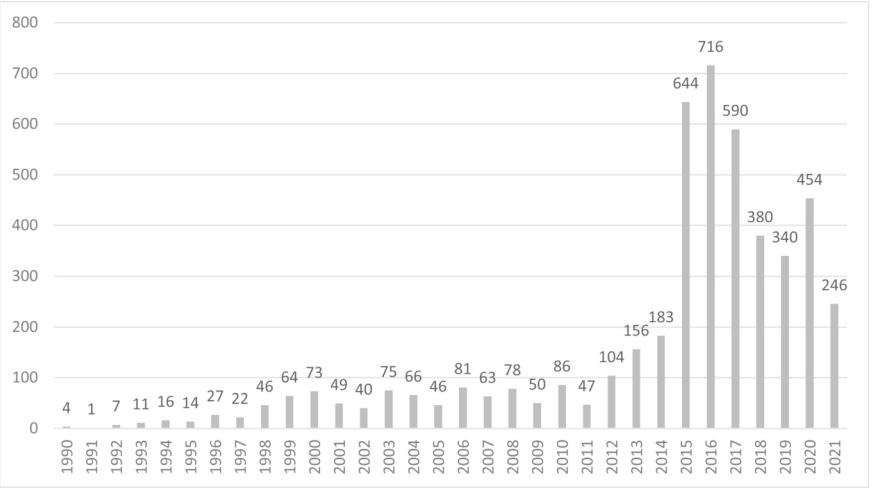
in size, with increasing media representation, and attempts at politically codifying LGBT rights on the national, regional, and local levels. As this chapter will show, the anti-LGBT movement emerged in reaction to such policy proposals and not so much as a direct reaction to pro-LGBT activism or LGBT visibility.

The organizations that would later engage in anti-LGBT activism did either not exist or were silent on this topic before the emergence of the actual movement. In order to get a glimpse into how conservative Protestantism dealt with LGBT issues prior to their politicization, the first part of this overview focuses on the *Kukmin Daily* news coverage on homosexuality in the 1990s and early 2000s. This newspaper was chosen due to its conservative Christian outlook and origins. It was founded in 1988 by Cho Yonggi, head pastor of *Yoido Full Gospel Church* (*yŏido sunbogŭm kyohoe*), one of the largest Christian congregations worldwide, which is affiliated with the pentecostal *Assemblies of God*. The analysis covers all articles with the search term "homosexuality" (*tongsŏngae*) for the 1990s. From the years 2000 onwards, selected articles are analyzed in detail.

5.1 Relative insignificance of anti-LGBT stances in the 1990s and early 2000s' Christian-conservative media coverage

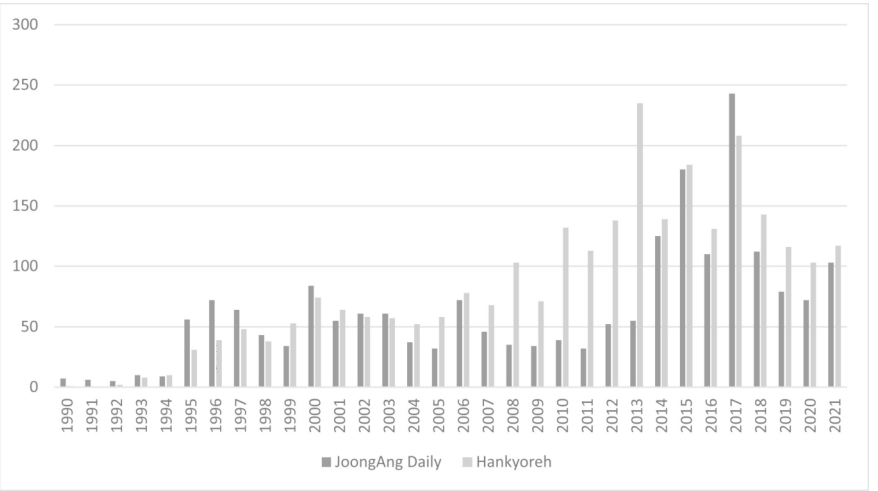
The Christian-conservative newspaper *Kukmin Daily* did not show much interest in the topic of homosexuality in the 1990s and early 2000s. Figure 1 displays minimal media attention to homosexuality from 1990 until 1995, with articles including the term 'homosexuality' ranging from the minimum of one article in the year 1991 to 16 in 1994. From 1996 on, there was a slight increase in the coverage of homosexuality, reaching a first minor peak in 2000 with 73 reports mentioning the topic. The numbers go down again afterwards, with 49 articles in 2001 and 40 pieces in 2002. This up-and-down pattern continues on a low level until 2012, when a slight rise in numbers began. The years 2015 till 2017 see an extreme surge and high numbers of articles mentioning homosexuality, reaching the absolute peak in 2016 with 716 articles. Numbers decrease again after 2016, but remain on a relatively high level, spanning from 454 articles in 2020 to 246 in the year 2021.

Figure 1: Kukmin Daily articles including the search term 'homosexuality'



By way of comparison, other major Korean newspapers show similar patterns, displaying very low coverage in the mid-early 1990s, low-medium numbers after that until the mid-late 2000s, and higher numbers of articles including the search term 'homosexuality' in the 2010s (cf. Figure 2). Compared to the conservative mainstream newspaper *JoongAng Daily*, the progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh* reports significantly more on homosexuality from 2007 until 2013, showing peaks in the years 2008, 2010, and 2013 – moments when the political discussions on proposals for a comprehensive anti-discrimination law were in full swing.

Figure 2: Media coverage of the conservative JoongAng Daily and the progressive Hankyoreh newspapers on homosexuality. Data provided by bigkinds.or.kr



It is noteworthy, though, is that the numbers of homosexuality-related news coverage of these two major newspapers were not nearly as high as in Kukmin Daily, especially in the years from 2015 onwards. One could assume that there must have been an immense increase of issues and events related to homosexuality that journalists felt necessary to be covered – at least from a Christian-conservative point of view. The extreme surge of articles suggests that this may not have been the only incentive for this intensified news coverage in Kukmin Daily. Probably, it was also an intentional editorial decision to funnel greater attention on homosexuality and related topics.

Kukmin Daily on homosexuality in the 1990s

In the 1990s, however, homosexuality was treated differently by Kukmin Daily journalists – both in terms of quantity and quality. The vast majority of the 212 articles that include the search term 'homosexuality' in this period only mention the topic once, like a side note. Only a few articles have homosexuality as their core subject. The fact, however, that homosexuality is mentioned only at the margins, without being problematized in most cases, is interesting in itself. As Table 2 shows, the highest number of article topics in the 1990s consists of book reports, movie reviews, and reports on foreign film festivals – most of which happen to also treat homosexuality as part of their artwork.[2] These reports are generally neutral and have the purpose of informing the readers of new publications and releases. The same is true for the second largest category, articles on events and occurrences abroad that are related to LGBT rights, and the category of 'tabloid' or general interest articles. Some of these news pieces, however, do include negative foci, for example, when treating sex scandals in several countries, the hostile stance of the US Republican Party on homosexuality (1992, August 15),[3] and the debate on the *Don't ask, don't tell* policy of the United States military (multiple articles in 1993), which represented an ambivalent improvement for LGBT soldiers since it allowed them to serve in the army only as long as they do not open up about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. These negative points are not raised in order to either distance oneself from such occurrences or applaud certain actions. Rather, these articles simply pass on information about what is going on elsewhere. Choosing to report about these topics indicates a general interest, yet in most cases, the journalists do not ask what the respective event abroad could mean for Korea.

2 Some also have an explicit focus on homosexuality, e.g. a publication on 100 gay men in history (15 April 1996). One book review is even treats two new publication that openly criticizes the repressive heterosexism in South Korea (2 December 1994).

3 I refrain from providing full bibliographical information of the Kukmin Daily articles when only used for short reference, but rather give the dates or years of the articles. I do, however, give the full bibliographical information (also in the bibliography at the end of this study) whenever I directly quote from articles or relate their content in greater detail.

Table 2: Topics covered in Kukmin Daily articles on homosexuality, 1990–1999 (N=212)

Topic/tendency	Number of articles	Topic/tendency	Number of articles
Reports on books, movies, art, film festivals	76	'Tabloid' or general interest reporting	25
LGBT-related ongoings abroad *Of these: including a clear focus on religion*	57 12	Articles on HIV/AIDS	15
		Relating survey results including items on LGBT topics	6
Anti-LGBT stance *Of these: including clearly Christian argumentation* *Criticizing media for positive LGBT representation*	35 15 13	Noticeably neutral reporting on LGBT issues[a]	14
		Pro-LGBT reporting	2

Notes: The categories in this table only give a broad overview of the topics covered, as well as their respective tendency in terms of LGBT issues. The categories are not exclusive; overlaps exist. [a] Neutral in the sense that one could have expected negative reporting in a conservative Christian newspaper, e.g., when it comes to Biblical interpretations or LGBT issues that are treated negatively in other articles.

Some articles on foreign occurrences also cover achievements for LGBT rights, or attempts to attain them, such as discussions on introducing same-sex marriage in the US state of Hawai'i (1996, May 25). Other neutral if not positive articles include one on thriving gay businesses in the United States (1995, April 15), one that reports about human rights problems faced by gay men in Russia (1992, May 28), and a news story about hate crimes in the United States, which, one could say, almost shows compassion for the murder case of Matthew Shepard, a young men from Wyoming who was killed just because he was gay (1999, August 24). New developments in reproductive medicine were also treated, stating neutrally that also lesbian women (1999, January 11) and gay men (1999, February 22) could benefit from these developments. The 1990s' news coverage of Kukmin Daily includes two noteworthy articles that prove historical awareness of the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany. One article criticizes Japan for not accounting for its past misdeeds, comparing it to Germany, which was willing to compensate victims of the Nazi regime, among them homosexuals (1994, September 1). Another article states that Germany started the compensation of Holocaust victims, again explicitly mentioning homosexuals (1999, June 30). These latter two articles are particularly interesting when comparing the historical awareness expressed here with the rhetoric that would later be used in anti-LGBT activism. Some anti-LGBT organizations and activists, for example the anti-LGBT group *People's Solidarity for a Healthy Society* (*kŏnganghan sahoe-rŭl wihan kungmin yŏndae*) would – in an unabashed inversion of victims and perpetrators – refer to homosexuals as "Nazis" and "Gaystapo" (People's Solidarity for a Healthy Society 2017; cf. also chapter 8.3).

Considering the Christian-conservative outlook of Kukmin Daily, such rather neutral articles are even more surprising when it comes to religious topics. The first distinctly religious comment on news related to homosexuality is made in 1993. The report deals with a new medical treatment that may 'heal' people from their homosexuality. The article, however, states one should not attempt to change people's sexual orientation because one must not interfere with God's creation order, basically claiming that homosexuals are made this way by God (1993, December 28). This is also in stark contrast to how the anti-LGBT movement handles the topic in later years, presenting so-called 'conversion therapies' as both possible and desirable for LGBT people.

The 1990s have seen negative news coverage on homosexuality as well. Table 2 shows that a total of 35 articles have an explicitly anti-LGBT focus. Among these, 15 articles feature clearly religious anti-LGBT arguments. The first longer Kukmin Daily piece dealing with homosexuality as a central topic is entitled "What does the Bible say about same-sex lovers?". Interestingly, the author, Pastor An Chong-man, starts off by claiming that friendship between people of the same sex is not opposed by the Bible, illustrating this with the story about David and Jonathan in the Old Testament.[4] Referring to seven Bible verses that are commonly regarded as condemning homosexuality, he describes same-sex activities as a sin and claims that "nowhere in the Bible there is any indication that God made certain men or women homosexual". Rather, homosexuality is presented as a choice by people who feel lonely and depressed (An, Chong-man 1994, August 6). Other articles have a similar orientation, criticizing homosexuality from a Christian perspective, two of which provide an interpretation of the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which the authors claim condemns same-sex activities (1996, July 11; 1998, October 16; 1999, October 14). A commentary from 1995 (February 25) is remarkable not so much for its citing of Bible verses that are allegedly hostile towards homosexuality, but due to its derogatory reference to newly forming, publicly visible homosexual groups that claim rights. In fact, this is the only instance that Kukmin Daily refers to Korean LGBT rights groups in the 1990s.

The majority of articles critical of homosexuality, however, is not confined to merely theological perspectives on homosexuality – even if involving emphatic statements of disapproval from a conservative Christian perspective. Rather, most articles relate to concrete occurrences and phenomena in Korea and abroad. Kukmin Daily reports about what seem to be matters of concern, for instance, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In sum, 15 articles make a link between this health issue and homosexuality. In most of these reports, the latest Korean or worldwide infection statistics are reported, including in some cases surprisingly detailed information, such as the surnames of newly infected persons in Korea (e.g., 1992, May 28). One column comments on the newest HIV/AIDS statistics of the *World Health Organization* and describes the disease as a "punishment from heaven", since many of the infected people act in opposition to the Bible's prohibition of homo-

4 The David and Jonathan narrative in the Old Testament books 1 and 2 Samuel has also been interpreted, especially by queer theology scholars, as a portrayal of homosexual love, thus going beyond mere friendship. For an overview on this, see Harding 2016.

sexuality (cited in Kukmin Daily 1995, May 1).[5] Another area of concern is how churches abroad treat LGBT issues. There are 12 articles in the 1990s with such a focus, for example dealing with the US *United Methodist Church's* rejection of ordaining homosexual persons (1996, May 3), the struggles within the Anglican Church on the same question of whether to accept homosexual priests (3 articles in 1998), and on the *World Council of Churches*' decision to set up a committee to mediate in the conflict between orthodox and western churches over women's ordination and homosexuality (1998, December 15). While most of the articles on HIV/AIDS and foreign churches' dealings with homosexuality go without outspoken hostility towards LGBT people, what becomes obvious is a diffuse sense of danger conveyed through journalistic means. Already the decision to cover these topics along with mentioning homosexuality as a potential threat to health or church structures is telling, as it may provoke negative reactions with the newspaper's readership. Yet, for the 1990s, it would be premature to regard this as an evidence for a clear-cut anti-LGBT editorial orientation of Kukmin Daily – mainly because there are so few distinctly anti-LGBT articles during that time.

The instances in which articles report about concrete actions of Christian organizations are especially noteworthy. These activities are precursors of the future actions of the Korean anti-LGBT movement. Interestingly, most of these actions have a clear focus, that is, reproaching the media of reporting about allegedly 'unethical' sexualized contents including homosexuality. In 1996, for example, the *People's Association to Fight Media that Incite Obscenity and Violence* (*ŭmnan p'ongnyŏksŏng chojang mech'e taech'aek simin hyŏbŭihoe*), an association of 32 Protestant organizations, criticized a magazine and an advertising company for depicting homosexuality in an advertisement. They wrote an open letter deploring that the advertisement's content "not only greatly harms teenagers' emotions but also goes against social ethics" and threatened to boycott the magazine and company in question (cited in Kukmin Daily 1996, March 2). Another group that repeatedly criticized media and art contents is the *Christian Ethics Movement* (*kidokkyo yulli silch'ŏn undong*). In 1997, for instance, the organization issued a list of pop songs harmful to teenagers, decrying, among other things, the portrayal of homosexuality (1997, April 7). In another announcement, the Christian Ethics Movement criticizes the TV broadcasting service SBS for allegedly presenting Protestantism in a bad light and promoting, among other detrimental contents, homosexuality (1997, May 8). Kukmin Daily itself also chimes in in blaming other media. A 1995 article suggests that young people get attracted to homosexuality through the Internet and magazines and demands that "lewd chats" be prohibited in order to protect the youth from the "serious disease" of homosexuality and from "western sex culture" (Yi, T'ae-hŭi 1995, June 7). Over the course of the 1990s, Kukmin Daily accuses further media outlets and popular culture contents of depicting homosexuality, including TV dramas (1995, October 7) Korean television in general (1996, August 20), movies (1998, October 26), and a novel (1999, June 21).

5 An interesting aspect of this article, as well as of one other in that year (1995, February 25), is that it does not only use the modern Korean word for homosexuality (*tongsŏngae*), but also the rather outmoded term '*namsaek*', which literally means 'male color' and explicitly refers to male same-sex desires and activities. For an overview of the history of male homosexuality, including accounts on different terms used for this phenomenon, see Johannemann 2021.

It is striking that in these last-mentioned reviews, there is no explanation as to *why* homosexuality is regarded as a threat to young people and to the church as a whole. It seems that the authors are under the impression that is enough to just mention homosexuality, assuming that the readers will know about the alleged badness of homosexuality anyways. The Kukmin Daily reporting of the 1990s only provides one concrete example of concrete anti-LGBT counteraction. A short article from 1998 advertises for a video "indicating the problematic aspects of homosexuality", including 'experts' such as Reverend Lee Jonah (*Yi Yo-na*), a "former homosexual" who would later become an important figure for the anti-LGBT movement – or more specifically, for the Korean 'ex-gay' movement. Arguing against homosexuality in the 30-minute documentary, another pastor is quoted as saying that "homosexuality not only destroys the humanity and sexual identity of men and women as made by God, but it also destroys the universal values of human society, that is, marriage, childbirth, and the family system" (cited in Yi, Kang-mi 1998, September 19).

Kukmin Daily reporting on homosexuality in the early 2000s: ongoing ambivalence

The early 2000s see a continuing ambivalent reporting on homosexuality. However, more articles treat homosexuality as a focal topic and the number of articles containing negative opinions on the issue tend to increase compared to the 1990s. This rising interest can be attributed to the first-ever coming out of a Korean celebrity, Hong Seok-cheon (*Hong Sŏk-ch'ŏn*), a TV show presenter and actor, who as a result got shunned from entertainment business for several years. Hong was able to reestablish himself later and remains, to date, one of the most famous openly gay TV personalities in Korea.

Kukmin Daily reports about his coming out on 27 September 2000. In the following weeks, there is a noticeable increase in the number of articles on homosexuality, some of which demonstrate a clearly hostile attitude. One article, for example, quotes Protestant and Catholic organizations' comments on the Hong case, claiming that homosexuality goes against the Biblical truth and that church groups have to get active to heal homosexuals (2000, October 3). Other articles show similar religious arguments, claiming that homosexuality is sinful behavior destroying the family (2000, October 10), that homosexuality is not part of God's creation and a choice made due to sins (2000, October 16), and that one can overcome homosexuality through leading a life according to Jesus (2000, November 13; 2000, December 11). Some authors also make use of scientific research, which allegedly shows that homosexuality is not innate and emerges owing to environmental factors. This argument is then used to create a threat of the kind that homosexuality could spread like a disease – leading to peculiar commentaries like the following by a professor of *Hansei University*, an evangelical institution affiliated with Yoido Full Gospel Church: "One thing we should note is that there is a possibility that homosexuality becomes a trend. Psychiatrists say there is no risk of contagion, but just as homosexuality is prevalent in prisons and the military, there is a risk that homosexuality will spread due to increased demand" (cited in Kim, Sŏng-il 2000, November 18).

Neither the theological nor the scientific arguments presented in Kukmin Daily are consistent in the early 2000s. One article published shortly after Hong Seok-cheon's coming out neutrally presents biological and psychological evidence, arguing that homosexu-

ality is not a mental illness, but an inborn preference (2000, October 10). From an exegetical perspective, Bible interpretations differ. For example, Kukmin Daily reports about an educational event in which professor Ch'ae Kyu-man from *Sungshin Women's University* says: "It is time for the Korean church to seriously review how to preach the gospel to homosexuals by stepping back from its position of demeaning homosexuals and driving them out of the church by saying that homosexuality is an unconditional sin" (cited in Ham, T'ae-gyŏng 2002, April 27). Another article reviews a translated book ("20 Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid to Touch" by Tony Campolo) that criticizes, among other issues, the way especially evangelical churches treat homosexuals and reminds Christians that everybody should be treated with love (2001, May 3).

Even though Kukmin Daily presents a spectrum of theological positions on homosexuality in the early 2000s, the majority of articles includes a negative, opposing attitude against homosexuality. It is noteworthy, however, that positive views on homosexuality were able to get published. In later years, as I will show, Kukmin Daily's editorial orientation takes a clearly anti-LGBT direction. What is more, conflicts over Biblical interpretations, the correct way to treat LGBT people, and the directions of anti-LGBT activism will prove highly divisive within Protestantism (cf. chapter 12).

Besides the reactions to Hong Seok-cheon's coming out, two main topics continue to attract the attention of Kukmin Daily's reporting: the 'threat' of equal rights for homosexuals encroaching upon foreign churches, and the alleged danger of the Internet for the youth. Several articles raise concerns regarding certain developments abroad, in particular that of the *Presbyterian Church of the United States of America* (PCUSA), which had fierce and divisive debates on whether homosexuals could be ordained to priesthood (2000, April 10). Kukmin Daily describes this situation as "shocking", fearing that the confrontation between conservative and liberal fractions might lead to a split of the denomination (Kim Byŏng-ch'ŏl, 2001, June 19). It is noteworthy that, for the first time, Christian groups seem to feel compelled to take action against these developments, explicitly focusing on the topic of homosexuality. In the 1990s, statements from Christian groups had mentioned homosexuality only incidentally, in a row with other 'social ills'. In 2001, though, the *Hapdong* domination of the Presbyterian Church in Korea published a press statement urging its mother church, PCUSA, to explicitly refrain from allowing the ordination of homosexual priests (2001, October 9). It is with a sense of relief that Kukmin Daily journalist Kim Byŏng-ch'ŏl (2002, February 21) reports about the "victory for the conservatives", since PCUSA eventually rejected the ordination of homosexuals.

Kukmin Daily also relates how Christian organizations abroad address religious and political issues. The US *National Caucus of Korean Presbyterian Churches* (*changnogyo chŏn'guk hanin kyohoehyŏp*), a conservative Korean-American denomination, for example, announced strong opposition against the ordination of homosexual priests (2001, July 14). Another article deals with Christian groups in California taking the lead in opposing a proposed legislation granting same-sex couples more rights (2002, January 19). Other churches like the *Roman Catholic Church* (2001, May 16) and the US *Evangelical Lutheran Church* (2001, August 22) are reported as reaffirming their doctrinal bans on homosexuality.

The Internet is another big concern in Kukmin Daily's reporting about homosexuality. One article refers to the establishment of a website for lesbian high school students as

"shocking" (Yi Hak-chun 2000, May 9). Another article regrets that the young generation is exposed to harmful Internet contents, resulting in them talking without shame about issues such as homosexuality and transsexuality (2002, December 20). This critical reporting on asserted dangers for the youth through exposure to 'harmful' LGBT contents – be it on the Internet or mediated through cultural products – may have paved the way for the Protestant Right's harsh reaction to attempts at removing 'homosexuality' from the *Youth Protection Law*.

Relative insignificance and inconsistencies

The 1990s' and early 2000s' coverage of the conservative Christian newspaper Kukmin Daily on homosexuality is remarkable for at two reasons. First, considering its socio-politically conservative and conservative-Christian outlook, the relative insignificance of homosexuality leaps to the eye. This may be due to the fact that homosexuality in general was largely invisible back then, and also because LGBT rights activism has initially been rather reluctant and more community-oriented than geared towards policy changes (Bong 2009). Compared to the socio-political struggles around LGBT issues in other parts of the (western) world during that time, the news coverage of Kukmin Daily and other Korean mainstream media outlets is quite small. But Kukmin Daily does report about topics such as HIV/AIDS, and it also shows a keen interest in what is going on outside Korea in terms of LGBT rights, particularly concerning the situation of churches abroad – even if on a low quantitative level. There are certainly clearly negative articles on homosexuality, some of which feature a marked Christian argumentation – especially after the coming out of Hong Seok-cheon, an event that attracted a lot of attention. But overall, these distinctly negative articles only make up a relatively insignificant proportion. The vast majority of news coverage on homosexuality is rather neutral in this period.

Related to this aspect is the second surprising finding: Kukmin Daily's inconsistent and partly contradictory reporting on homosexuality in this period. The critique of other media outlets outlined above is particularly interesting, since Kukmin Daily itself does not observe its own demands. Alongside the few distinctly anti-LGBT articles, there are many more which do not problematize artworks with LGBT content at all. On the contrary, book reviews written in a rather neutral style, for example, can in fact be regarded as promoting the very product. Moreover, Kukmin Daily even features articles advertising events that other articles would decry as 'unethical' or 'sinful', such as the *Seoul Queer Film Festival* (1998, October 31) and a festival on sexual culture including homosexuality (1998, November 21). Even when contemplating the possibility that these news pieces may be simply adopted from news agencies or form part of the commercialized section of the newspaper, the inconsistencies remain astonishing. Kukmin Daily apparently did not follow a clear-cut editorial line on homosexuality in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Of note is also that the politically active parts of Korean Protestantism did not engage in anti-LGBT actions during this period. The *Christian Council of Korea* (CCK, *han'guk kidokkyo ch'ong'yŏnhaphoe,* short: *hangich'ong*) in particular could have been expected to champion anti-LGBT positions. The CCK was established in 1989 as an association of conservative Protestant and evangelical denominations with the aim of actively exerting

influence in society and politics. The liberal governments under the presidents Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) and Roh Moo-Hyun (2003–2008) faced fierce opposition from CCK (Cho, Kyuhoon 2014, 319). Had CCK promoted anti-LGBT activism, one can assume that it would have found support in the general public. Public opinion on homosexuality was not benevolent at that time in Korea, which is demonstrated in several Kukmin Daily articles reporting the results of surveys including items on homosexuality (see Table 2).[6] Taking a Gramscian perspective, one could argue that anti-LGBT sentiments were not part of the active, politicizable *common sense* of people in general, and of the Korean Christian community – including its media outlets – in particular. As this study claims, and as the next subchapter shows, this reluctance and partly ambivalent stance regarding LGBT issues changes fundamentally towards clearly opposing pro-LGBT positions and increased activity in the years from 2003 onwards.

5.2 Early anti-LGBT activism: 2003–2012

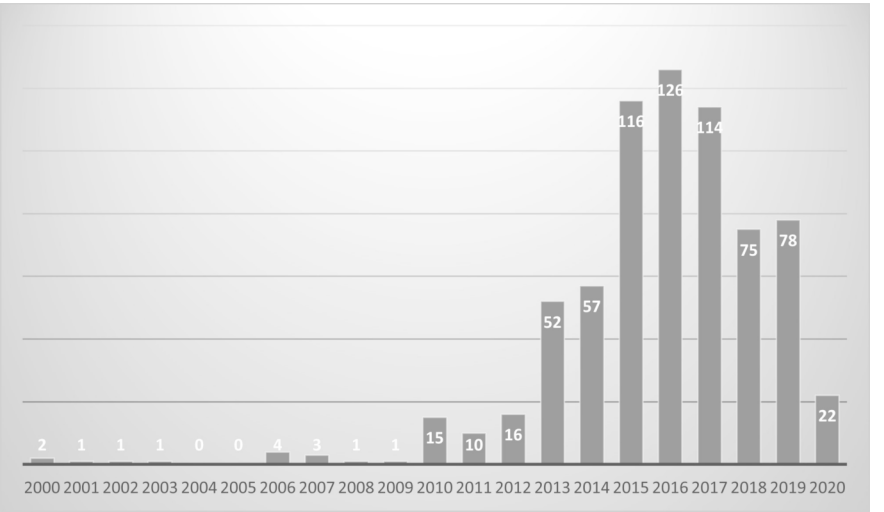
The period from the year 2003 onwards is marked by a new quality of anti-LGBT attitudes and actions. Larger parts of Korean Protestantism react to concrete LGBT-related phenomena and get mobilized. First central actors of the anti-LGBT movement emerge, and first successful interventions take place. The core issues of contention in the years until 2012 consist of proposals for laws or ordinances that promote LGBT rights: the deletion of the category 'homosexuality' from the list of harmful contents in the *Youth Protection Act* in 2003, the change of the family registration system in favor of trans people in 2006, anti-discrimination laws in 2007 and 2010, the attempted amendment of the *Military Criminal Code* in relation to homosexual acts in 2010/2011, and the *Seoul City Student Human Rights Ordinance* in 2011/2012 being the most important ones. Alongside the focus on legislation, television programs with LGBT content also get criticized a lot by conservative Protestant groups.

One measure to recognize heightened interest in a socio-political topic is to look at collective action around this issue. The Protest Event Analysis data, however, does not show many anti-LGBT protest events in the period 2003–2012 (cf. Figure 3). Even though Kukmin Daily did not report about concrete protest events – which could be due to media bias – the significance of the occurrences just mentioned becomes apparent when taking into account also the overall coverage of Kukmin Daily and press statements from

6 One 1996 opinion survey reported by Kukmin Daily, for example, shows that 63% of young Christians in Korea have a negative opinion about homosexuality. 9% of the interviewed persons would end a friendship if their friend turned out to be homosexual. The statistical validity of this study is questionable, though, since only 371 people participated in it (1996, March 7). The World Values Survey (WVS) confirms the negative attitudes South Koreans held on homosexuality in the 1990s and early 2000s. Respondents saying that homosexuality is 'never justifiable' made up 89.3% in 1990, 66.6% in 1996, and 47.6% in 2005 (with answer options ranging from 1 ['never justifiable'] to 10 ['always justifiable']; the numbers given here only covered the category 1, but the cumulated percentages of people leaning to a negative attitude towards homosexuality (i.e., categories 1–5) are actually higher; note: the WVS data for South Korea in 1990 only offers three answer options, 'never justifiable', 'always justifiable', and '6', an intermediate category). Cf. Inglehart et al. 2022.

the *Korean Association of Church Communication* (KACC, *han'guk kyohoe ŏllonhoe*), an important mouthpiece of the Protestant Right. The number of protest events increases slightly in the years 2010 until 2012, to then rise exponentially, reaching a peak with 126 protest events in 2016. There are less protest events in 2018 and 2019, yet remaining on a relatively high level. This quantitative development mirrors the curve of media attention seen above (Figures 1 and 2). I will address the reasons for the sharp increase of movement activities from 2013 in the following subchapter.

Figure 3: Anti-LGBT protest events per year.



Protest Event Analysis (PEA) data from Kukmin Daily and press releases of the Korean Association of Church Communication. Note: data for the year 2020 only from January until the end of April

Removal of the classification of homosexuality as "harmful and obscene" from the Youth Protection Act

On 2 April 2003, the *National Human Rights Commission of Korea* (NHRCK, *kukka in'gwŏn wiwŏnhoe*) issued a recommendation to remove the classification of homosexuality as "obscene and harmful" from the Youth Protection Act, which had been passed in this form in 1997. The following day, the *Youth Protection Committee* adopted NHRCK's resolution and, in turn, sent its decision to the National Assembly and to further responsible government agencies to revise the respective law and charters accordingly. Prior to this decision, LGBT rights groups had lobbied for this amendment of the law, which had been restricting the operation of their websites with content on LGBT rights and community service. The NHRCK concluded that banning such web content represented discrimination against homosexuals, being in "violation of Article 10 (right to pursue happiness), Article 11 (right to equality) and Article 21 (freedom of expression) of the Constitution" (NHRCK 2003).

The reactions from Christian organizations and media outlets were immediate and harsh. Kukmin Daily dedicated its first-ever editorial on homosexuality to this topic (2003, April 4) and published a cascade of articles criticizing the decision of the Youth Protection Committee and, in particular, the resolution of the NHRCK (2003, April 12; April 26). The arguments presented range from instigating the fear that now, homosexuality would spread due to increased media coverage and exposure through the Internet, that the revision would go against the Biblical teaching of the sinfulness of homosexuality (2003, April 3), and that the protection of young people should be more important than the rights of homosexuals (2003, April 4). The Christian Council of Korea also got involved in the contention using drastic vocabulary in a press release rejecting the changed Youth Protection Act, claiming that homosexuality "is a clear violation of Christian ethics and morality" and would "destroy the human social order". The CCK adds that "it is very dangerous to destroy the order of the majority for the sake of the happiness of a minority" (cited in Yu, Yŏng-dae 2003, April 7).

LGBT rights groups, in contrast, celebrated the decision of the NHRCK and the Youth Protection Commission as the first major success of their political advocacy work. The abolishment of the classification of homosexuality as a "socially unacceptable act" was finally enacted in April 2004 (Bong 2008). Human rights organizations were, however, very much aware of the backlash that was forming in the conservative Protestant camp and of the danger emanating from this new development. This awareness even spread to foreign supporters of LGBT rights in Korea. The US-based human rights organization *OutRight International*, for instance, lamented the "sharp anti-gay rhetoric" by conservative Christian groups, pointing out Kukmin Daily's eminent role in this campaign. The group also criticized that the Youth Protection Committee and NHRCK came under fire for their decisions (OutRight International 2003).

In fact, it seems that the controversy around the Youth Protection Act was the tipping point for Kukmin Daily in terms of anti-LGBT coverage. Since 2003, the newspaper has been showing a clear editorial orientation of decrying anything deemed to be in favor of LGBT rights. Kukmin Daily started dedicating editorials (*sasŏl*) to LGBT topics (15 in total in the period 2003–2012), thus turning to distinctly negative opinion pieces rather than just quoting others' oppositional sentiments. The LGBT-related news coverage has become more consistent, but not necessarily more constant. As shown above in Figure 1, the aggregate numbers of Kukmin Daily articles on homosexuality per year in the 2000s were on a higher average level than in the 1990s. Yet, even though the editorial direction became unambiguously negative towards LGBT issues, the reporting remained sporadic – definitely so in comparison to the immense increase starting in 2013 with hundreds of articles each year. What can be said for the time after 2003 is that Kukmin Daily turns into an important player in the journalistically mediated struggles over LGBT rights. It informs about its stance on the topic, provides arguments, discredits adversarial positions and organizations, and potentially persuades readers to adopt, and act upon these views. In 2003, Kukmin Daily initiates what Gramsci would call *integral journalism*, that is, a kind of media practice that has an activist as well as a pedagogical purpose. Kukmin Daily can be described as an early agenda setter within the Protestant Right's emerging anti-LGBT activities – way before any organized and truly systematic Korean anti-LGBT

movement sees the light of day. Chapter 11 will further elaborate on this particularly journalistic activism of the anti-LGBT movement.

Kukmin Daily reports on, and problematizes several further issues in the years following the contentious episode on the Youth Protection Act – issues that increasingly gain attention from conservative Protestant organizations in general. This study will not deal with each of these contentious topics in detail, but describe the conflicts around the *Anti-Discrimination Law* (*ch'abyŏl kŭmjibŏp*) as the most important aspect for the emergence of the Korean anti-LGBT movement.[7] In fact, several of the people interviewed for this study, both those with pro-LGBT attitudes (interviews 1, 13, 14) and anti-LGBT stances (interviews 23, 31) singled out the controversy over the Anti-Discrimination Law proposal in 2007 as the initial spark of the Korean anti-LGBT movement.

The Anti-Discrimination Law as initial spark of the anti-LGBT movement

Before Roh Moo-hyun (*No Mu-hyŏn*) was elected president in 2002, one of his policy pledges was to introduce a comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Law. After the election, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, which had been established by his predecessor Kim Dae-Jung (*Kim Tae-jung*) in 2001 (by the way, including an official mandate to protect sexual minorities – which had gone virtually unnoticed by conservative Protestant groups for several years[8]) set up an expert committee that presented a draft bill in 2004. After supplementary consultations with relevant ministries and also collecting opinions from the general public, the NHCRK finalized the draft in 2006, which was finally announced for legislation by the Ministry of Justice in early October 2007 (Kim, Chi-hye 2020). The proposed law was meant to substantiate the already existing *NHRCK Act* and provided protection from discrimination on the basis of 20 categories, among them gender, disability, national origin, religion – and sexual orientation.

The latter category in particular drew strong resistance from Protestant groups.[9] In March 2007, Kil Wŏn-p'yŏng, a physics professor of Christian faith at Busan University, took the lead in gathering 211 professors from 29 universities who signed a statement demanding the removal of the category 'sexual orientation' from the proposed Anti-Discrimination Law (Sin-Yun, Tong-uk 2007, November 8). The statement claimed that the

7 Some of these topics are treated elsewhere in this study, e.g., the framing that presents homosexuals as a threat to the Korean military and national security in chapter 7.2, and the role of media in chapter 11. For the case of the *Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance*, refer to Ol Teun Kim (2021) who provides a detailed argumentative discourse analysis of the policy making processes surrounding this successful legislation – one of the few successful pro-LGBT law proposals beyond the revision of the Youth Protection Act in 2003/2004.

8 Article 2 of the *National Human Rights Commission of Korea Act* includes the term 'sexual orientation' as part of a list of grounds upon which discrimination must not be made. This provision is part of the section "Definitions" of the NHRCK Act, concretely defining the term "discriminatory act violating the equal right" (NHRCK Act 2016).

9 In his analysis of the socio-political discourse around anti-discrimination legislation in Korea, Jongwoo Kim (2019) confirms this observation: he identifies the discourse conflict over 'sexual orientation' as the main element of veto powers in their – until now – successful attempts at preventing the introduction of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law on the national level.

rights of sexual minorities were overly considered while disregarding the alleged negative effect this law would have on teenagers and society at large. The signatory professors continued writing that the anti-discrimination law, which they frame as a single-focus act, that is, the "law to prohibit discrimination against homosexuals" (*tongsŏngae ch'abyŏl kŭmjibŏp*), "would overly recognize the abnormal and unethical homosexuality as normal and force this perception upon people". Moreover, they expected that, as a result, "pathological social phenomena such as the decrease in marriage rate, the low birth rate, and the spread of AIDS would be further aggravated" (cited in KACC 2007, March 9). The group of professors around Kil Wŏn-p'yŏng also sent faxes to relevant government organizations to protest against the inclusion of 'sexual orientation' into the Anti-Discrimination Law. Kil was an important figure in this particular fight against LGBT rights – and he would become one of the most important activists of the Korean anti-LGBT movement in the long run, organizing, and participating in anti-LGBT protest events and providing ever new arguments against equal treatment of LGBT people. In an article presenting "Christian voices" on the contended Anti-Discrimination Law proposal, Kukmin Ilbo quotes Kil Wŏn-p'yŏng as follows: "If the law passes, homosexuality will have to be taught as normal at schools and we [i.e., Christian groups] will not anymore be able to counsel or even just recommend that homosexuality should be avoided" (cited in Chŏn, Pyŏng-sŏn 2007, October 12). Interestingly, Kil Wŏn-p'yŏng had started off his socio-political activism in a completely different area. He and many of his fellow professors belonged to the *Scientists' Assembly Opposing Embryonic Cloning* (*pea pokche-rŭl pandaehanŭn kwahakcha moim*) before starting the fight against LGBT issues.[10]

Protestant groups joined this protest against the Anti-Discrimination Law as well. The Protestant organizations *Korea National Prayer Breakfast*, *Holy City Movement*, and the *Korean-Japanese Union of Christian Lawmakers* started a fax-sending campaign against the Ministry of Justice in October 2007. The *Christian Council of Korea* held a press conference and threatened to start a campaign to collect 10 million signatures should the clause including the term 'sexual orientation' not be deleted from the law proposal. In this context, these conservative Protestant organizations formed the first explicitly anti-LGBT group, the *Parliamentary Missionary Association against the Law Proposal Prohibiting Discrimination against Homosexuality* (*tongsŏngae ch'abyŏl kŭmji pŏban chŏji ŭihoe sŏn'gyo yŏnhap*). The progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh* reported that the Internet was full of comments and petitions against, but also in favor of including the category 'sexual orientation' into the proposed legislation (Shin-Yun, Dong-uk 2007, November 8; Yi, Sŭng-gyu 2007, October 22).

Pro-LGBT rights activists, some of which had taken part in devising the draft of the Anti-Discrimination Law, did not anticipate such a forceful opposition. Han Ch'ae-yun, an LGBT rights activist, argued that the upcoming presidential election in late 2007 also played a role in the fierce contention over the Anti-Discrimination Law. According to Han, the anti-LGBT protests indirectly supported the conservative presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak (*Yi Myŏng-bak*). On the other hand, the liberal government and po-

10 In fact, among the earliest texts against the Anti-Discrimination Law, one can be found on their website, e.g., listing problems that would arise if the law got passed. Cf. Scientists' Assembly Opposing Embryonic Cloning (2007, September 7).

litical camp of President Roh Moo-hyun (which would actually be voted out of office) wanted to safeguard its legacy in the human rights field, also by making compromises that would, eventually, erode the proposed bill. As a result, the Ministry of Justice discarded seven of the original 20 criteria for anti-discrimination, among them 'sexual orientation', also owing to pressure from the business world (Poore 2007).[11] Conservative Protestant groups welcomed this decision, but still found fault with the revised draft bill. The draft still included, added to the reduced list of categories, the term 'and other reasons', which they feared could allow the government to reintroduce 'sexual orientation' again through the backdoor. Twenty church leaders held a press conference at the National Assembly to deplore this fact and demanded its deletion (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2007, December 13). In the end, the whole legislative process was dismissed in 2008.

The failure of the Anti-Discrimination Law in 2007 and 2008 was the first big success of conservative Protestant groups in terms of preventing legislation in favor of LGBT rights. The story does not end here. Quite to the contrary, I argue that it is the actual starting point of the Korean anti-LGBT movement. From this critical juncture onwards, the Protestant Right increasingly realized the potential of the topic. By virtue of the conflict over the Anti-Discrimination Law, they came to perceive that they have political clout and that LGBT-related topics are fitting and easily politicizable ones for conservative Christian groups. As I have shown before, the overall level of activism remains relatively small until 2013 (cf. Figure 3). However, the topics targeted by conservative Protestant actors have diversified from 2007, the frames used for problematization increased, as did the number of organizational actors involved in contentious episodes (for the latter aspect, cf. chapter 10). At the same time, a paradox comes to the fore here: the very law that was supposed to eliminate discrimination of (among others) LGBT people has, instead, instilled and increased hostility and discriminatory behavior, predominantly emanating from the Korean Protestant Right.

Diversification and consolidation of anti-LGBT activism, 2010–2012

Conservative Protestant actors showed their hostility towards the idea of equal rights for LGBT people on many occasions in the years after the first attempt at a comprehensive anti-discrimination law. The PEA data reveals overall 51 protest events for the years 2003–2012. The main topics that these events treated are the following, given in the order of their first occurrences: the revision of the family registry system to also allow trans people to register (3 times, 2006), repeated attempts at passing an anti-discrimination law including a clause for sexual minorities (12 times, 2007 and 2010), discussions about removing the prohibition of male same-sex acts from the *Military Criminal Code* (6 times, 2010 and 2011), critiques of TV programs with LGBT content (9 times, 2010–2012), and the *Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance* (14 times, 2011 and 2012) (cf. also Table 3).

After the events in 2007, the two following years remained rather quiet concerning anti-LGBT activism. The year 2010, however, saw a sharp increase in protest activities. First and foremost, protests were directed against the second attempt at introducing a

11 The other six dropped categories were: national origin, language, educational background, medical history, family situation, and criminal history.

comprehensive anti-discrimination law. Even though the Lee Myung-bak government belonged to the conservative camp, the Ministry of Justice restarted the consultation process on the Anti-Discrimination Law, which again was met with fierce resistance from Protestant anti-LGBT groups. This time, the protests against the Anti-Discrimination Law became more frequent: the PEA data exhibits three protest events in 2007 and eight in 2010. In 2013, there were even 21 protest events against the third attempt at introducing such a bill. The arguments used against the draft bill are pretty much the same as in 2007, most prominently claiming that those who oppose homosexuality and call it, according to their faith, 'sinful' would be criminalized (Lee, Wondong 2021, 85f.).

What is notable for the period after 2010 until 2012 is not only the slight increase in numbers of protests and the diversification of topics, but also that protest forms gain more variety and that concrete protests, in the narrow sense, start to emerge. For example, the first-ever 'forum' against the Anti-Discrimination Law is held (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2010, October 29), including lectures of people that are presented as experts. Such fora would become a common attribute of anti-LGBT activism in the following years. They are significant, since they are often held at the prestigious National Assembly premises, which is only possible if actively approved by one or more members of parliament. Political involvement also starts to stretch to the higher levels. In 2010, the CCK leader, Yi Kwang-sŏn, met with Prime Minister Kim Hwang-sik to deplore the newly proposed anti-discrimination bill and particularly the incorporation of the homosexuality clause, threatening that if the governing block does not delete this, the Protestant churches would fight against the bill as if it was a "question of death and life" (*sasaenggyŏldan*). The prime minister promised that he would discuss the "problem of homosexuality" with the committees of the ruling conservative party (*Grand National Party*, *Hannaradang*) (cited in Ham, T'aegyŏng 2010, October 22).

Also in 2010, the first actual protests in the narrow sense took place, reinforcing the collective dimension of anti-LGBT activism. On October 28, Protestant groups staged a protest in front of the NHRCK headquarters in Seoul, criticizing the NHRCK's declaration that article 92(6) of the *Military Criminal Code* may be unconstitutional because it discriminates against homosexuals. In 1962, the military regime had introduced into the code an article penalizing sex between men – making it, until today, the only explicitly anti-gay piece of legislation in South Korea, which has, however not been enforced until recently.[12] It was also in this context that two of longest standing anti-LGBT social movement organizations appeared for the first time in the Kukmin Daily coverage,

12 In another article, I (Johannemann 2021, 95) have summarized the recent developments in this field: "From 2014 onwards, around 50 male soldiers have fallen victim to article 92(6) of the Military Criminal Code, i.e. they were either investigated by the military police or even brought to trial. Article 96(6) criminalizes anal sex and other "indecent acts" by imprisonment of up to two years, even if the sexual relationship is consensual. The present version of the law does not specify the gender of the 'offenders', but so far only male soldiers have been prosecuted. The Military Criminal Code was revised in 2009. Before then, the official English translation for the punishable act was 'sodomy'; the Korean word, however, was *kyegan*, a derogative term for male same-sex practice, literally meaning 'sex between chickens'. The prosecution of men who (were said to have) had sex with other men intensified significantly in 2017, when 29 men were investigated, one of which was indicted for a prison sentence. The South Korean military's 'Examination Criteria for Conscript

the *Esther Prayer Movement* (*esŭdŏ kido undong*) and the *Coalition for Moral Sexuality* (*parŭn sŏngmunhwa-rŭl wihan kungmin yŏnhap*) (Yu Yŏng-dae 2010, October 28). On 16 November 2010, the CCK submitted a petition with 2233 signatures to the *Constitutional Court*, demanding not to allow gay men to serve in the army (Yu Yŏng-dae 2010, November 16). A few months later, Protestant groups held a press conference in front of the Constitutional Court applauding its decision to uphold the ban of same-sex conduct in the military (Yu Yŏng-dae 2011, March 31).[13] As I will show in my analysis of the frames used by the anti-LGBT movement in chapter 7.2, the topic of LGBT people in the army plays an important role in the activists' framing efforts.

Overall, the action form that was used most in the years 2003–2012 was the publication of press statements or press conferences, coming up 40 times in the PEA dataset, with a majority of instances in the years 2010–2012 (30 times).[14] Petitions and signature campaigns constitute the second largest number with 10 times, followed by actual protests and rallies occurring 8 times. Other action forms like educational events (such as the 'forum' mentioned above), meetings with politicians, prayer meetings, or fax and e-mail sending campaigns only appear once or twice in this period. Press statements are a relatively simple and low-cost means to make oneself heard. This action form is, however, not directly conducive to mobilizing sympathizers and the general public for collective action. Petitions and concrete rallies are more likely to accomplish this task, since they generate publicity, but also show that a considerable number of people have already joined the fight. In general, the early years of anti-LGBT activism are distinguished by relatively low levels of participation. This changes already in the context of the struggles around the Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance, which marks the transition of the Korean anti-LGBT movement towards a spike in activity, participation, and increased institutionalization. I argue that already before this point, one can call anti-LGBT activism a movement, definitely from 2007 onwards, since diverse actors from within conservative Protestantism gather to fight against a concrete topic in a continuous and organized manner.

The Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance was proposed by the progressive city government under Mayor Park Won-soon (*Pak Wŏn-sun*) to ensure students' dignity and freedom, including guidelines for the protection against discrimination at schools – also on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Conservative Protestant organizations reacted with fiery disapproval, collecting signatures (2011, September 22), issuing statements with 231 signatory civil society groups (2012, January 26) and dismissive

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Physical Examination' include an article on "sexual identity disorder" and 'sexual preference disorder'" (cf. also Center for Military Human Rights 2019, 1f.).

13 The Constitutional Court upheld the ban of same-sex conduct in the Military Criminal Court four times, in 2001, 2011, 2016, and 2023. In April 2022, however, the Supreme Court overturned another court's verdict of two soldiers who were charged with having consensual sex outside their base. The Court ruled that article 92(6) of the Military Criminal Code does not apply to consensual acts outside the army context (Choe, Sang-Hun 2022, April 21).

14 The number of press statements in the PEA dataset has a certain bias, since it includes data from Kukmin Daily *and* the Korean Association of Church Communication (KACC). The KACC *only* publishes press statements, which means that they can be said to be overrepresented in the dataset when counting them as an action form.

newspaper editorials (e.g., 2011, October 19), appealing to church members to get active by sending faxes and e-mails to the responsible politicians, threatening to file a lawsuit (2011, December 19), holding a prayer meeting against the ordinance (2012, January 31), and by staging protests with up to 800 participants (2012, January 5). The ordinance was passed including the provisions for LGBT students despite this rather significant amount of counter-protest. Ol Teun Kim (2021) argues in his dissertation that the Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance was confirmed under such inhospitable circumstances due to the powerful impact of counter-heteronormative storylines, effective tactics of the pro-LGBT discourse coalition, and favorable discursive opportunity structures in 2011–2012.

Despite such beneficial circumstances, such as a liberal government at the local level in Seoul, many attempts at reaching equality for LGBT people failed in the following years, owing to the intense resistance of the anti-LGBT movement after 2012. The next subchapter will give an overview of the wide array of topics tackled by this anti-emancipatory activism to further elaborate on the development during – what one might call – the 'boom' period of the Korean anti-LGBT movement.

5.3 Peak of activism and routinization of the anti-LGBT movement, 2013 onwards

The years 2013 and 2014 mark a steep increase in anti-LGBT protest events, numbers that are only topped by the years after that (cf. Figure 3). Of all protest events that the PEA dataset includes, the vast majority, 92.4% (640 out of 693) lie in the period 2013–2020. Given this huge number of events as well as the abundance of topics and actors, this section will only provide a broad overview and the general trends of this period. Detailed analyses of selected aspects will be offered in chapters 7–12. Before delving into the general overview, I will consider the question as to why there was such a surge in anti-LGBT activism in 2013 and 2014.

I argue that the intensified activism can be attributed to five main occurrences, which reinforced resistance from the Protestant Right. Two occurrences concern attempts at guaranteeing and codifying LGBT rights in legislative processes, that is, the third anti-discrimination bill proposal in 2013 and the *Seoul Human Rights Charter* in 2014. Another controversy revolves around same-sex marriage, however, without any proposed law. Contention also emerged in reaction to a church-internal event, the *World Council of Churches*' (WCC) general assembly in Busan 2013. Finally, the anti-LGBT movement mobilized against the *Queer Culture Festivals* in Seoul and Taegu in 2014, thus for the first time directly attacking pro-LGBT events and groups.

Anti-discrimination law, 2013

In March 2013, three policy proposals for anti-discrimination bills gained attention from the Protestant Right. One bill had been introduced into the National Assembly by the minor *United Progressive Party's* (*t'onghap chinbodang*) representative Kim Chae-yŏn in November 2012. Two further proposals followed in February 2013, initiated by deputies from the main oppositional *Democratic United Party* (*minju t'onghaptang*), receiving sup-

port from more than 70 lawmakers (Yi, Yong-p'il 2013, March 27). The reaction from Protestant Right groups was swift and proved effective. The first press statement calling attention to the renewed introduction of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law was issued by the Korean Association of Church Communication on March 6, calling the bill a "bad" or "evil" law (*akpŏp*) (KACC 2013, March 6). Just six weeks later, all three law proposals were withdrawn, which was welcomed by Protestant leaders, claiming that by achieving this retraction "the Korean churches rescued the 'morality of the Republic of Korea'" (cited in Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, April 22).

In the meantime, the Protestant Right mobilized opposition on several fronts. Opinion pieces in Kukmin Daily, for example, presented the anti-discrimination law as in fact promoting "reverse discrimination" (*yŏkch'abyŏl*) (Kukmin Daily 2013, March 13), as infringing the freedoms of expression and religion for the sake of the rights of homosexuals and thereby allegedly instigating homosexuality (So Kang-sŏk 2013, March 18). It is interesting how these articles frame the anti-discrimination law, labeling it as a "homosexuality law" (*tongsŏngaebŏp*) (ibid.), rendering the term 'anti-discrimination law' in quotation marks throughout – suggesting that the law creates new discrimination, namely, against Christians – and insisting that the bill promotes same-sex marriage (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, April 22). Apart from media framing, the anti-LGBT movement also took to the streets, staging protests in front of the National Assembly and the headquarters of the Democratic Party to sustain a full-fledged campaign, which had been started by Protestant church leaders (Kukmin Daily 2013, March 18). Part of this campaign were also petition movements promoted by an ad-hoc coalition of conservative Protestant groups, the *People's Solidarity Against the Anti-Discrimination Law* (*ch'abyŏl kŭmjibŏp pandae kungmin yŏndae*). The coalition collected more than 100,000 signatures on paper (yet, having the enormous goal of 10 million signatures) and reached 95,000 comments on a ministerial online notice board, of which it claimed 90% were against the Anti-Discrimination Law (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, April 9). Other actions of the coalition included the production and distribution of 40,000 leaflets featuring, among others, a list of all the members of parliament who supported one of the proposed bills and posting an ad in the major newspaper *JoongAng Daily* with the deliberately suggestive heading "Confessions of a homosexual – secrets about homosexuality that homosexuals do not tell you" (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, March 28). In general, many Protestant groups got mobilized in this particular fight against the Anti-Discrimination Law, including more than 3,000 churches from the city of Inch'ŏn alone, which officially voiced their disapproval of the policy (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, April 17).

The resistance was massive and even politicians from the Democratic Party who had introduced the bill in the first place succumbed to the pressure. The member of parliament Kim Han-gil, for example, was quick to respond to the counter-activism by claiming that he was against discrimination, while at the same time distancing himself from homosexuals in a press release from March 19: "I personally disagree with homosexuality, and I oppose the promotion and spread of homosexuality" (cited in Yi, Yong-p'il 2013, March 27). The Protestant Right took pride in yet another successful fight, becoming apparent in a Kukmin Daily article which features a table including all the major actions of Protestant groups that led to the eventual withdrawal of the bills (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, April 22). Other parts of the anti-LGBT movement, however, called for prudence even in light of this triumph. They feared that, in the future, lawmakers could again introduce an anti-

discrimination law proposal. Therefore, established Protestant organizations founded a new association geared towards the prevention of any pro-LGBT legislation, the *Korean Churches' Emergency Committee for Countermeasures Against the Legalization of Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage* (*han'guk kyogye tongsŏngae-tongsŏnghon ippŏp chŏji pisang taech'aek wiwŏnhoe*) (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, April 25).

The anti-LGBT movement thus changed its strategy from merely reactive opposition to pro-active resistance against pro-LGBT legislation (cf. Green 2000). This also became obvious later in the year when major Protestant associations, among them the *Christian Council of Korea* (CCK) and the *Communion of Churches in Korea* (CCIK), joined forces to demand a law that would prohibit education and advertisement on "unethical sex culture" (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, July 24). This cooperation between CCK and CCIK is astonishing since the two associations are normally united only in their reciprocal disdain.[15] The opposition against homosexuality, however, clearly has the potential of bringing together organizations that would, under other circumstances, not cooperate with each other. This is an important observation for Korean Protestantism, which is characterized by notorious fragmentation and discord (cf. also chapter 12). Cooperation against LGBT issues even transcends religious borders beyond Protestantism. In October 2013, yet another anti-LGBT coalition was formed, now also including a Catholic and a Buddhist group (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, September 29). However, these two groups and the Protestant Right mainly have in common their staunch socio-political conservatism rather than a joint religious worldview.[16]

World Council of Churches assembly in Busan, 2013

The *World Council of Churches* (WCC) was founded in 1948 in the spirit of Christian ecumenism, bringing together 352 churches from more than 120 countries as of 2022 (WCC 2022). The tenth WCC assembly was held in the Korean city of Busan in 2013. The *National Council of Churches* (NCCK), an interdenominational Christian association considered to be liberal, was part of the assembly's organization committee, while the more conservative parts of Korean Protestantism took a critical position towards this global church event. Already in 2009, when Busan was declared the next venue for the WCC assembly, the *Hapdong* denomination of the Presbyterian Church in Korea and the CCK

15 In 2012, the CCK was faced with accusations of corruption and heresy. Moreover, due to disagreements over the election of a new leadership for the church association, 20 denominations split from the CCK and formed a new association, the CCIK (Paek, Sang-hyŏn 2017, August 27).

16 The organizations' names in themselves are telling: the *Patriotic Catholics for Korea* (*ch'ŏnjugyo nara sarang kido moim*) and the *National Buddhist Council for the Security of Korea* (*taehanmin'guk chik'igi pulgyo toch'ong yŏnhap*). In general, the Protestant Right has a conflictive relationship with both the Catholic Church and Buddhism. PEA data also testifies this. In 2014, for example, a Protestant group started a campaign to counter the spread of Roman Catholicism in South Korea, the 'Movement to inform about the character of the Catholic Church' (*kat'ollik chŏngch'e alligi undong*), which combined anti-Catholic attitudes with anti-LGBT stances (Yu, Yong-dae 2014, August 31). Buddhism also faced hostility from conservative Protestantism. In 2015, for example, the leader of CCIK criticized Seoul mayor Park Won-soon for allowing the Seoul Queer Culture Festival to take place, demanding on a poster at a protest in front of Seoul City Hall the following: "Homosexuality mayor [sic!] and Buddhist mayor OUT" (cited in Yu & Paek 2015, May 26).

opposed this decision, reproaching the WCC of allegedly supporting homosexuality and communist groups (Paek, Sang-hyŏn 2009, November 3; 2009, November 27). Similar accusations were brought forward in 2013. The KACC in particular was critical of the WCC, decrying its alleged pro-communism in the past as well as the fact that it allowed a booth of a Christian LGBT group and did not repudiate a pro-LGBT declaration that had been issued in the context of the WCC Assembly. On November 3, LGBT rights activists from foreign Christian groups had staged a protest in Seoul, demanding that discrimination of LGBT people – especially emanating from conservative Protestant groups – had to stop (Kim, Jae-won 2013, November 3). In its press statement, the KACC concludes that it is "fortunate" that "the members of the Korean church saw the reality of the WCC in real time" in view of such ongoings. Also, the KACC holds that "the WCC should no longer leave scars on the Korean church as in the past" (KACC 2013, November 11).

The KACC here refers to historical events during the Korean War. In 1950, the WCC had recommended to enter into negotiations with the Communists, which President Syngman Rhee – himself a Christian of Methodist faith – categorically refused, calling the WCC henceforth pro-communist. This conflict also created a rift within Korean Protestantism, since Rhee established a Protestant anti-communist group, whereas other parts of Korean Protestantism wanted to maintain relations with the WCC (Yoon 2017). The critical stance of the Protestant Right towards the WCC is thus nothing new, but based on historical developments and conflicts in Korean politics and churches. The particularly *Protestant* anti-communism, which had been reinforced by Syngman Rhee in the early days of the Republic of Korea, has fed anti-WCC outbursts ever since.

The accusation of promoting homosexuality, however, is a rather new addition to the catalogue of criticisms directed at this global interdenominational organization. The Protestant Right combines established enemy stereotypes with new ones – a manifestation of dynamic continuity. The WCC has been presented by conservative Protestants in Korea as a wicked organization. Its suspected welcoming attitude towards LGBT people is then just another evidence for its badness, bluntly ignoring the fact that many member churches of the WCC are far from accepting homosexuality. At the same time, this deliberately evoked controversy around the WCC's alleged pro-LGBT attitude creates a vivid threat for conservative Protestants in Korea for two main reasons. First, the controversy showcases how LGBT issues may lead to (further) intra and interdenominational split-ups. Second, the WCC is depicted as an example of how pro-LGBT stances 'infiltrate' Korean churches and Korea at large, in short: an external threat. The Korean anti-LGBT movement uses these kinds of frames a lot (cf. also chapters 7.5 and 12). The WCC Assembly in Busan in 2013 can be regarded as a catalyst for these lines of argumentation in the years to come.

Evoking the threat of same-sex marriage

In 2013, same-sex marriage was not a new topic for conservative Protestant actors. It had been a contentious issue already before, coming up in Kukmin Daily articles on 'worrisome' examples from abroad – either concerning the legalization of same-sex marriage and similar policy models, or relating debates within foreign denominations on whether one should allow same-sex couples to get married in church. The 'threat' of same-sex

marriage was brought up also inside Korea, as exemplified by the controversy around the anti-discrimination law in 2013. Although the proposed bills did not mention same-sex marriage at all, Protestant Right actors prominently alleged that non-discrimination for LGBT people would, ultimately, allow them to get married in Korea, too. In fact, up until today, there has not been a single concrete law proposal for introducing same-sex marriage in Korea. This fact notwithstanding, the 'menace' of same-sex marriage is often invoked by conservative Protestant actors, mentioning it in the same breath as the general need to oppose homosexuality. Ahead of the presidential election in 2012, for example, the *Korea Christian Public Policy Council* (*han'guk kidokkyo konggong chŏngch'aek hyŏbŭihoe*) submitted a list of ten issues of utmost relevance to Korean Protestantism to the two major political parties, demanding them to state their positions. "Homosexuality and same-sex marriage" were part of the list. In response, the governing conservative *Saenuri* Party affirmed its clear opposition against both, while the Democratic United Party just stated its "sympathy for the churches' position", thus factually also being against acknowledging equal rights for LGBT people (cited in Yu, Yŏng-dae 2012, November 29). This example shows that the anti-LGBT movement achieved to implant an anti-LGBT attitude also into important parts of Korean politics (cf. also chapter 10.5).

As these examples show, same-sex marriage has been a contentious issue for the Protestant Right already for a longer time. The years 2013 and 2014, however, saw three events that – from the perspective of the anti-LGBT movement – represented imminent 'threats' that Korea had to face in terms of same-sex marriage. The first one was the public, yet only symbolic gay wedding ceremony of a famous Korean film director, Kim Jho Gwang-su (*Kim Cho Kwang-su*), and his partner Kim Seung-hwan (*Kim Sŭng-hwan*) in central Seoul in September 2013. This event stirred great commotion within the conservative Protestant community. During the ceremony, one anti-LGBT activist attempted to smudge the couple with a mixture of human excrements and soybean paste, but was prevented from doing so. Apparently, the level of hostility was rising within a portion of Protestants who turned to employing radical action forms. Kim Jho Gwang-su and Kim Seung-hwan had tried to officially register their marriage with the authorities, hoping to create a legal precedent (Borowiec 2014, February 11). However, their application for a marriage license was eventually rejected by the *Sŏdaemun District Office* in December 2013. In a press statement, 244 Christian groups applauded this "reasonable" decision and reinforced their opposition against any attempts to legalize same-sex marriage, which they claimed would be unconstitutional and against the national sentiment (cited in Yu, Yŏng-dae 2013, December 11).[17]

The second watershed event occurred in the United States. In June 2013, the US Supreme Court declared the *Defense of Marriage Act* unconstitutional. The Defense of Marriage Act had been introduced by the Clinton administration in 1996 to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman. In Korea, the Protestant Right lamented this US development. The KACC wrote that the Supreme Court ruling was

17 It was not the first time that a homosexual couple officially applied for a marriage certificate in Korea. Already in 2004, two men hadtried to register their union, but had been rejected by the district office in charge. Kukmin Daily reported about this "first gay marriage" in Korea, calling it a "shock" (Hwang, Il-song 2004, March 8).

regrettable for a country that claims to be Christian, describing the United States as a "a backward country in terms of ethics and morals". Korea, the KACC warns, should not be obsequious to the US and not follow such a "degenerate culture", but rather continue its determined resistance against pro-LGBT legislation. In contrast to the US, Russia is presented as a good example, having passed a law restricting the spread of information on non-traditional family models (often referred to as 'gay propaganda law'), also in June 2013 (KACC 2013, June 27).

It becomes apparent that in this context, the Korean anti-LGBT movement started using anti-US-American narratives. The US, along with other western countries, are depicted as failed states in terms of 'sexual ethics' – mainly, but not exclusively, for introducing pro-LGBT legislation. The more the US and other countries refrained from discriminatory legal practices over the years, the more disappointed and critical the Protestant Right got, discarding the US in particular as a henceforth bad example in this respect. This is surprising, since historically, the Protestant Right exhibited strong pro-US American tendencies (Shiwoo 2018, 105–110). When the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2015, So Kang-sŏk, chief pastor of the *New Eden* mega-church (*sae eden kyohoe*), wrote in a column in Kukmin Daily that he was disappointed to see few churches in the US opposing this decision. In contrast to this, he claimed that such a thing would not happen in Korea because Korean churches were different (So Kang-sŏk 2015, July 15). Pastor So presents Korea, and Korean Protestantism in particular, as something special, as 'the last man standing' in the face of 'evil' developments – or to use more religious vocabulary, as a chosen nation. The resistance against same-sex marriage and, in extension of this, foreign influences, serves as a motivation to get active to protect Korea's purported uniqueness.

A third critical moment was a statement made by Seoul mayor Park Won-soon in October 2014. Park had said in an interview with a US media outlet that he wished South Korea would become the first country in Asia to introduce same-sex marriage. The backlash from the Protestant Right was immediate and massive, accusing the mayor of following a hidden agenda supporting LGBT rights and using homosexuality for political purposes (Yu Yŏng-dae 2014, October 16). As a result, Park Won-soon retracted his statement and became more reticent in other matters regarding LGBT rights as well, as the controversy over the *Seoul Human Rights Charter* shall demonstrate.

While same-sex marriage had been posing an implicit, dormant threat to Korean conservative Protestantism for a longer time already, the years 2013 and 2014 really made it a central topic in its anti-LGBT activism. The PEA data shows that activism against the recognition of same-sex unions intensified after this period. In a manner of speaking, one could say that that same-sex unions represent a fertile topic for the anti-LGBT movement. It is both flexible and easily graspable for the general public. The movement combines the 'threat' of same-sex marriage with other issues such as the anti-discrimination law as shown above. This works well, because a certain level of knowledge on this topic is already present in the general public, including the narratives on the alleged ethical decadence of other countries and the purported danger for 'normal' heterosexual families, which the anti-LGBT movement evokes over and over again (cf. chapter 7.2).

Protests against the Seoul Queer Culture Festival, 2014

For a long time, the *Seoul Queer Culture Festival* (SQCF) had gone unnoticed by anti-LGBT forces. The SQCF was first held in 2000 with just a handful of people, but soon grew into the biggest and most visible public queer event in Korea. In 2014, however, the festival faced challenges on several fronts. The festival, which had taken place in the Hongdae district the years before, had to relocate to Sinch'on owing to complaints from Hongdae residents. Shortly before the 2014 edition of the festival on June 7, however, the *Sŏdaemun District Office* withdrew its permission, saying it would be unfit to hold such an event in face of the tragedy of the Sewŏl Ferry, which had sunk on April 16, leaving 304 people dead. The festival organizers regarded this as a pretext, assuming that rather, pressure from conservative Protestant groups was behind the cancellation of the permit. Having still the official permission from the police, the organizers decided to push ahead with the event anyways. The SQCF was then met with counter-protests from conservative Protestant groups, which had registered their gathering as a commemoration rally for the victims of the Sewŏl Ferry disaster, while actually disturbing the queer festival's proceedings – in an organized and systematic manner, as one pro-LGBT activist recalls (Interview 3). When the 3,000 SQCF participants wanted to start their scheduled queer parade, they were blocked by counter-protesters who lay down on the street and under parade trucks for more than four hours. In the end, when the police started dissolving this counter-protest, some anti-LGBT protesters resorted to violence, leaving 10 people injured. Four anti-LGBT protesters got arrested (Kwŏn & Yi 2014, June 9; Yu, Yŏng-dae 2014, June 8).

The Queer Culture Festival in the city of Taegu in the same year also for the first time drew active opposition from conservative Protestant groups. The latter's problematization of the event already started well in advance – just like the counteractions against the SQCF – organizing a seminar on the alleged dangers of homosexuality and starting a signature campaign involving the churches of the region to prevent the festival from taking place (Ch'oe, Il-yŏng 2014, May 28). According to Kukmin Daily, around 400 people joined the counter-protest against the Taegu Queer Culture Festival on June 28. Frictions also occurred here when the queer parade was blocked, with people pushing their bodies against each other. After 20 minutes, the festival organizers decided to change the course of the parade. Further violent clashed did not occur, perhaps also due to the massive police deployment of 700 officers (Ch'oe, Il-yŏng 2014, June 29).

What is of importance at this point is to note that for the first time, significant numbers of people enter into direct conflict with pro-LGBT groups, making the new 'discovery' that queer festivals are part of the perceived 'bad' visibility of LGBT people and their demands. Before, the anti-LGBT movement had predominantly reacted to law proposals and media coverage on homosexuality. While the Korean LGBT community had been affected by anti-emancipatory activism already ahead of the protests against queer culture festivals, they now had to fear that these relatively safe spaces for expressing themselves in public were not so safe anymore. The motto of the 2014 SQCF, "love conquers hate", leaves a sour aftertaste in this context, since from 2014 onwards, anti-LGBT groups – or 'hate forces' (*hyŏmo seryŏk*), as they are commonly referred to by the queer community – began to actively sabotage, and counteract against these events. One could even argue that the counter-rallies got institutionalized to a certain extent. Starting in 2015,

the rally against the SQCF has developed into one of the biggest recurring anti-LGBT events in Korea, featuring large numbers of participants and booths, as well as almost ritualized actions such as camping in front of the Namdaemun district police station to hinder the organizers of the queer festival from applying for the necessary permit to use the events' location (Ock, Hyun-ju 2015, June 28). In this sense, the year 2014 marks a new quality of anti-LGBT activism, discerning a new target and thus getting more obviously involved in movement-countermovement dynamics (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). Be that as it may, the principal focus of anti-LGBT activism remains the opposition against (perceived) pro-LGBT legislation or attempts to codify pro-LGBT attitudes in some way, as the next final watershed event of the years 2013/2014 exemplifies.

The Seoul Human Rights Charter, 2014

The *Seoul Human Rights Charter*, alongside the policy proposal for an anti-discrimination law, is another political project that was met with fierce opposition from the Protestant Right. The Charter was conceived as a collaborative grassroots project by the *Seoul Metropolitan Government*, bringing together 180 volunteer Seoul citizens who would, according to the plan, draft human rights guidelines for the capital city. They received assistance from human rights activists and experts who coordinated the process, planning that the city government could enact and declare the charter on December 10, 2014, that is, Human Rights Day. However, in the end, the Human Rights Charter has not been declared due to vociferous opposition from conservative Protestants. One clause in particular drew harsh criticism, namely, that a person "has the right not to be discriminated against based on his or her sexual orientation or sexual identity" (Lee, Claire 2014, November 30). The opposition did not only stem from Protestant Right actors outside the charter's preparatory committee. One of my interview partners, a human rights expert who was part of the committee, recalled that at a certain point in the discussions, some people started showing hostility towards the idea of integrating non-discrimination for LGBT people into the charter. The expert added that the group of facilitators had been "a bit naïve" at first, because they had thought that the selection of committee members was representative. "But, I think, later on we were told that in fact some Christian groups, conservative Christian groups, they really actively volunteered themselves to be in the pool" (Interview 11). When the sixth and final, decisive committee meeting took place on November 30, more than half of the members refused to vote at all and left, leaving only 73 people, of whom 60 voted in favor of non-discrimination of LGBT people. Protestant groups had tried to influence the proceedings already before, blocking the fifth committee meeting from taking place and holding rallies against the enactment of the Human Rights Charter on November 18 and 28 (Yu, Yŏng-dae 2014, December 1). The Seoul Metropolitan Government then refrained from declaring the charter because the committee did not adopt it in a unanimous vote (a rule that had not been specified anywhere before), regretting that "[u]nfortunately, working on this charter has been creating more social conflicts. We would like to take more time to listen to a variety of opinions from our citizens on this matter" (cited in Lee, Claire 2014, November 30; cf. also Wee 2014, December 10).

Mayor Park Won-soon, who was denounced by anti-LGBT forces as a supporter of LGBT rights not only in the issue of same-sex marriage (see above) but also in this matter, did listen to more voices, meeting leading representatives of the *Council of Presbyterian Churches in Korea* (*han'guk changnogyo ch'ongyŏnhaphoe*) on December 1. During the meeting, Park said that "universal discrimination should be prohibited, but I definitely do not support homosexuality" (cited in Yu, Yŏng-dae 2014, December 8). Disappointed and infuriated by what happened to the Seoul Human Rights Charter, LGBT activists occupied Seoul City Hall from December 6–11, deploring the fact that Mayor Park Won-soon "yielded under pressure of extreme rightists and conservative protestant groups of South Korea", as they outlined in an open letter (Wee 2014, December 10). The sit-in protesters demanded a meeting with Park, along with an apology for failing to intervene against the anti-LGBT intruders' disturbance of the fifth committee meeting, and called for the proclamation of the Charter as planned (ibid.). Eventually, Mayor Park met with LGBT activists and apologized to them, but their demand to reconsider the charter was to no avail.

Even though the Seoul Human Rights Charter was eventually unsuccessful, pro-LGBT activists assessed the occupation of Seoul City Hall as an important event for the Korean LGBT movement. It was not the first time that LGBT activists resorted to this action form, though. Already in 2011, when the Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance got under attack from conservative Protestants, LGBT activists had staged a sit-in at the Seoul Metropolitan Council – yielding, back then, a successful outcome. A few weeks after the occupation and sit-in in 2014, Illan, an LGBT activist, recapitulated the events at a queer discussion event, pointing out the achievements of getting support and solidarity from 300 organizations and significant media attention. Moreover, Illan added, the sit-in at Seoul City Hall was a strategic choice made not only to achieve a certain goal, but also, and importantly, to start a debate on what human rights actually meant in Korea (Solidarity for Human Rights Korea Webzine 2015, January 26).

The question of human rights is also crucial for the anti-LGBT movement. After the Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance, the controversy over the Seoul Human Rights Charter was another important chain of events that revolved around human rights. The years to come would, as the sections below will explicate, comprise many more contentious human rights bills at the regional and local levels. At the same time, the concept of human rights itself has developed into a contested topic within right-wing Protestant circles. As chapters 8.1 will demonstrate, the anti-LGBT movement makes use of different framing strategies in terms of human rights. Activists, for instance, suggest that whenever 'human rights' come up in political debates or in legal texts, this is a way to sneak LGBT rights into laws through the backdoor. They also identify other notions and terms such as 'gender' and 'diversity' automatically with homosexuality. Concurrently, the anti-LGBT movement claims that the rights of Christians or of the majority would be affected negatively if pro-LGBT legislation passed, thus pitting the rights of one group against those of others. Relatedly, parts of the movement transform the concept of human rights in a fashion that serves their purposes, for example when the 'ex-gay movement' claims 'ex-gay human rights', reproaching LGBT activists of harming the rights of people who allegedly became heterosexual or cis gender 'again' (cf. chapter 8.1).

What is more, the struggles around the Seoul Human Rights Charter show that opposition from the anti-LGBT movement does not go unchallenged. LGBT rights groups do not remain silent in face of anti-emancipatory ruses, they also build networks and solidarity. This resistance does not only stem from outside the Protestant community. Pro-LGBT portions within Korean Protestantism are also becoming increasingly courageous and assertive, questioning from within the alleged Christian unity in opposing LGBT rights (cf. chapter 12). Several pro-LGBT activists and allies who I interviewed for this study argued that anti-LGBT activism had an unintentional, paradoxical side effect: the stronger the anti-LGBT movement got, the more vigorous pro-LGBT activism became as a result. Through their problematization alone, the Protestant Right actually made sexual minorities more visible. Potentially, anti-LGBT activism even created sympathy for LGBT people among the general public, who may disapprove of the partially radical action forms and the degrading rhetoric used by the opponents of LGBT rights (Interviews 1, 5, 11, 26).[18]

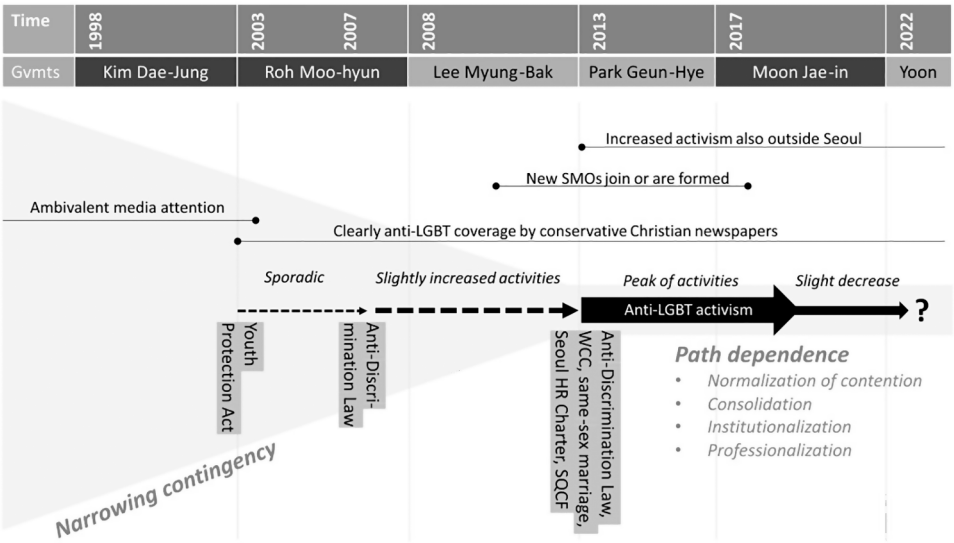
2003, 2007, 2013/2014 as watershed moments for the amplification of anti-LGBT activism?

The literature on institutional change, especially in historical institutionalism, broadly differentiates between phases of institutional stability on the one hand, and relatively brief periods during which change, even of a fundamental kind, is possible on the other. The latter are referred to as *critical junctures*, "*relatively* short periods of time during which there is a *substantially* heightened probability that *agents' choices* will affect the outcome of interest" (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007, 348).[19] Critical junctures are commonly triggered by exogenous shocks, which open up the potential for vast changes. But once the choice for the path of change is made in this phase of contingency, institutional stability sets in again, what is called *path dependence* (cf. e.g. Mahoney 2000; Sydow et al. 2009).

18 For a detailed account on the formation and role of anti and pro-LGBT discourse coalitions around the Seoul Human Rights Charter refer to Ol Teun Kim's doctoral dissertation (2021).

19 In the field of historical institutionalism, there are different definitions of critical junctures that – while all being related to comparatively short periods of time during which huge change becomes possible – have diverse foci, such as agency, contingency, antecedent conditions, or the concrete institutional formation. For an overview of these different approaches, see Capoccia (2016).

Figure 4: Overview of the development of anti-LGBT activism



Note: Liberal/progressive governments ('Gvmts') are highlighted in black; conservative governments in gray. Dotted/dashed arrows indicate sporadic activities; the breadth of arrow roughly indicates the intensity of anti-LGBT activism (i.e., protest events per year). Abbreviations: SMO = social movement organization; WCC = World Council of Churches; HR = human rights; SQCF = Seoul Queer Culture Festival.

The controversy around the Youth Protection Act in 2003, the fight against the Anti-Discrimination Law in 2007, as well as the events in 2013 and 2014 just outlined may well be considered crucial moments for the emergence, development, and amplification of anti-LGBT activism in Korea. Anti-LGBT activists who I interviewed claimed, for example, that the Sewŏl Ferry accident in 2014 (presumably, in fact, meaning the struggles against the SQCF) made activism stronger in the long run (Interview 7) and led to the establishment of many new anti-LGBT organizations (Interview 23).[20] Moreover, one activist claimed that the prevention of the anti-discrimination law proposals was the biggest success of the anti-LGBT movement so far (Interview 23). While each of these three occurrences can be regarded as relatively short time periods in which certain actors (the Protestant Right) reacted to external shocks (mostly pro-LGBT law-proposals) and took specific decisions (to actively fight against equal rights for LGBT people) with long-term consequences (a consolidation of anti-LGBT activism, and ultimately, of anti-LGBT attitudes within the Protestant Right), it would be wrong to call them critical junctures. The impacts of each of these moments in time in themselves is too small to speak of a critical juncture. But they do, in each case, figure prominently in dynamizing the Protestant

20 Several of my pro-LGBT interviewees agreed with this view. They also regard the years 2013 and especially 2014 as the time when the anti-LGBT movement significantly intensified its activities (Interviews 8; 13; 18). One person said that while before, anti-LGBT actions were each like a "storm in a teacup", after 2014, a full-fledged conservative political agenda developed and prejudice and hatred against sexual minorities became deeply engraved especially in Protestant churches (Interview 13).

Right's anti-LGBT activism. And each moment does contribute to institutionalizing anti-LGBT activism and attitudes, thus creating a path dependence in the sense that departing from these choices would harm the trustworthiness and legitimacy of those leading and backing the movement.

Figure 4 summarizes these insights, relating them to the overarching political opportunity structures on the national level, that is, the respective governments from 1998 until 2022. What becomes evident is that the first two watershed moments for the anti-LGBT movement roughly coincide with the changes in government in 2003 and 2008. The year 2003 also marks the period in which the Korean *New Right* (*nyu rait'ŭ*), of which the Protestant Right forms an important part, really gained traction, fighting against President Kim Dae-Jung's *Sunshine Policy* and the rapprochement with North Korea (Eom 2004; Ryu, Dae-young 2004). The 2007 controversy over the Anti-Discrimination Law took place at a time when the election campaigns for the new presidency had already been in progress. While clear linkages between these political events and anti-LGBT actions are not discernable for these points in time, it is important to note that there are organizational and content-related overlaps. The CCK, for example, figured prominently in the movement against the Sunshine Policy and also acted as a staunch supporter of the presidential pledge of Lee Myung-Bak's – himself a conservative members of the Presbyterian church. When Lee became president, anti-LGBT activism increased. As several of my pro-LGBT interviewees mentioned, the political landscape became more beneficial for anti-LGBT activism under his rule (Interviews 13; 18; 20). One could argue that with the new conservative government backing the Protestant Right and vice-versa, the latter had more capacities to engage in new fields of action, strengthening among other topics its anti-LGBT flank. Later years have seen a more clearly visible politicization of LGBT topics, in the sense that politicians actively picked up on the subject or were pushed towards anti-LGBT positionings, as chapter 10.5 demonstrates in greater detail. The withdrawal of the Seoul Human Rights Charter and Mayor Park Won-soon's Janus-faced role in this is one example.

Besides the distinguishable crucial events outlined above, Figure 4 highlights the *gradual* development of anti-LGBT activism. Over the years, the focus of the Protestant Right on LGBT topics became stronger and stronger, or in other words, contingency decreased. The possibility to choose another pathway, that is, ignoring the topic as they had largely done before or even taking a positive stance, dwindled. But the decline of contingency did not happen passively. Each instance of anti-LGBT action, each protest event has been an unambiguous decision to actively deal with the topic. The Protestant Right did not just react to what they were faced with. Rather, certain actors determined that it is necessary to fight LGBT rights and pro-LGBT attitudes within society. This active *attribution of threat* (McAdam et al. 2001, 43) is done in relation to concrete exogeneous occurrences, but it is also, so to speak, a gradual process running in the background. The continuously negative media coverage in Kukmin Daily after 2003 as shown in Figure 4, but also 'educational' events organized by anti-LGBT groups (cf. chapter 11) contribute to the increasing focus on LGBT issues. This goes to the extent that, after some time, the contention on LGBT topics becomes commonplace – or, as a human rights expert phrased it, there is a "normalization of conflict" (Interview 6). Put differently, anti-LGBT activism got consolidated and institutionalized.

The next chapters substantiate this argument by proceeding towards the ideational level of the anti-LGBT movement's activities, that is, its framing strategies. Essentially, this is where the anti-LGBT movement indulges in the 'cultural war' mentioned at the beginning of this section – a strategy of trying to win the hearts and minds of people, what Antonio Gramsci calls a 'war of position'. This study argues that alongside preventing or abolishing certain laws and ordinances, a central goal of Protestant anti-LGBT activism is to instill anti-LGBT attitudes into the general public. But before delving into the analysis of the movement's framing efforts, I will now focus on the topics, targets, action forms, and places of protest of the anti-LGBT movement in order to conclude the general overview of its development and general workings.