



Original Research

Christianity and Politics: Korea versus Kenya

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Abstract: The process tracing of the relationship between Christianity and politics in Korea versus Kenya led to the discovery of similar trajectories that are based on two underlying conditions: a) a large portion of the country's population is Christian, and b) religious groups have historically invested in the democratization processes. These two conditions led to: 1) government or political parties' desire to co-opt the religious group or leaders to increase its voting power or political influence, 2) religious leaders or churches proposing to provide stewardship or governance to the government, and 3) some mainstream churches trying to stay neutral upholding separation between the church and state in the aftermath of democratization. After democratization, a trend of church partisan political polarization has intensified. Kenya's polarization has aggregated along interethnic/tribal fault lines. The partisan polarization of the South Korean church has intensified with left-oriented social change advocacy condemned by right-wing actors as threatening South Korean sovereignty in the face of the North Korean continuing threat. South Korean political actors utilize sectarian movements to mobilize activists and voters, while South Korean sectarian leaders in turn utilize this political relationship to legitimize their civil society existence and activity. The Kenyan and South Korean cases provide further evidence of the global resurgence of religious identity as a vehicle for political activism to direct the governance capacities of the sovereign state.

Keywords: *Activism, Catholic, Christianity, Evangelical, Kenya, Korea, Protestant, State*

Introduction

This article traces Kenya's historical relationship between Christianity and politics and compares it to Korea's historical development. The article focuses on the benefit of revealing recurring empirical regularities (Waltz 1979). It highlights the established patterns in the relationships between religious groups and political parties in two cases. They are Korea's democratization movement of 1987 and Kenya's adoption of multi-party politics in 1991. As the connection is viewed as causal, the descriptive component of the method is emphasized in this article. Key steps in the process are characterized (Mahoney 2010) to analyze particular and common trajectories of the two cases to elicit change and sequence.

This analysis engages in process tracing the relationships between mainstream religious denominations such as Protestant and Catholic separately with the state. The article attempts a more meaningful analysis of details by focusing on the alliance patterns between particular churches, religious groups, and leaders with political parties. In short, both countries' process tracing of the relationship between Christianity and politics led to the discovery of similar

trajectories that are based on two underlying conditions. First, a considerable section of Kenya's population is Christian. Second, religious groups were heavily involved in the democratization process. These two conditions led to: 1) government or political parties' desire to co-opt the religious group or leaders to increase its voting power, 2) religious leaders or churches proposing to provide stewardship or governance to the government, and 3) some mainstream churches trying to stay neutral upholding separation between the church and state in the aftermath of democratization.

South Korea's Protestant Churches and the People's Movement of 1987

When the history of the affiliation between religion and politics before the democratization of Korea is explored, the role of the Protestant religion is emphasized (J. Lee 2022). In the 1956 presidential direct election, Protestants did their best to get Syngman Rhee elected (J. Lee 2022). A national-level Christian election committee was organized, and it included provinces, counties, and local churches. The Protestant campaign for Rhee was blatant. The Sunday before the election was designated as an "election prayer day." It was the Protestant religious group's "repayment" to Syngman Rhee, who gave enormous preferential treatment to Protestantism (J. Lee 2022, para. 5). Jo (2015) refers to In-cheol Kang's book, *Subordination and Autonomy - The Formation and Religious Politics of the Republic of Korea* (I. Kang 2013) to emphasize that the Korean early Protestant leaders received a tremendous level of material gain immediately after liberation (Jo 2015). The US military government "gave up most of the 'Japanese religious real estate and property' (Jeoksan), including Shinto shrines and Cheonrikyo, to Protestant churches, while large churches such as Youngnak Church, Gyeongdong Church, and Seongnam Church, established themselves prominently from inception through preferential distribution" (Jo 2015, para. 3, referencing I. Kang 2013).

The predominant level of support from the public, supported by the "sudden death of his major opponent" at the start of the presidential campaign, provided the basis for the assumption that Syngman Rhee would win the election (Haggard, Kim, and Moon 1991, 853). Nine candidates for the vice president position were competing against each other (J. Lee 2022). Among them, Lee Beom-seok, who had a Daejonggyo background, emerged as a strong candidate, but Protestants were wary of Daejonggyo as the Protestant church leaders had conflict surrounding the issue of national flag salute (Yoon 2015). Protestants regarded Daejonggyo as an anti-Christian religion and argued that it would be dangerous for a member of Daejonggyo to become vice president.

Another problem facing the Protestant church leaders was that five candidates were Protestants—Lee Yun-young, Ham Tae-young, Lee Gap-seong, Lim Young-shin, and Cho Byeong-ok. Lee Yun-young was supported by the Methodist Church and Vietnamese refugees, Ham Tae-young was supported by the Shinmin School affiliated with the Korea Theological University, and Lee Gap-seong was supported by the orthodox conservative theological school. Since it is difficult for a Protestant candidate to be elected if the votes had

been dispersed, the Protestant church leaders planned to allocate votes to one Protestant candidate who could receive the most votes from the general electorate. It is difficult to ascertain if this plan worked in the end, but Ham Tae-young, who had been viewed as “unsuccessful” due to Rhee Syngman’s “political maneuvering,” was eventually elected vice president (J. Lee 2022, para. 7).

A similar type of fierce competition among vice president candidates around religious fault lines happened during the third presidential election in 1956. It was a confrontation between Liberty Party candidate Lee Ki-boong, a Methodist deacon, and Democratic Party candidate John Myun Chang, a Catholic politician. The Protestant church leaders were already worried and conjectured that if a Catholic candidate became vice president, he would obey the Vatican (J. Lee 2022, para. 7). Therefore, Pastor Jeong Il-hyung, who led the Democratic Party's election campaign at the time, stated that not only is the Democratic Party not a Catholic party, but it will not discriminate based on religion even if candidate Jang Myeon is elected vice president. In fact, after being elected vice president, Jang Myeon promised at a foreign press conference that he would distinguish between religion and politics (Choi 1983; Hae 2022).

Christian influence in the third presidential election was evinced in the form of a comparison of Syngman Rhee to Moses and Lee Ki-boong to Joshua. Korea's religious groups active in the political scene gathered their momentum, as they rejected President Park Chung Hee's three-term Yushin constitutional amendment in 1969. With this struggle, the religious activists were divided into conservative versus progressive camps and formed an ambivalent relationship with the military regime (J. Lee 2022). While the conservative camp formed a close affiliation with the military regime, the progressive camp confronted the military regime and participated in the democratization movement (J. Lee 2022).

With the Korean people's democratic movement in the mid-1980s, the importance of religion increased and religious groups, especially Protestant leaders, played a more prominent role in presidential elections. Two factors acted as important variables for the connection between religion and politics: one was the direct election system revived through the civil uprising in 1987, and the other was the growth of the religious population (J. Lee 2022). The rapid growth of the religious community during the industrialization period (8 million Buddhists, 6.5 million Protestants, and 2 million Catholics in 1985) and the simultaneous emergence of a direct election system allowed voters to periodically judge politicians (J. Lee 2022).

The president and the Protestant churches, specifically, have been inextricably linked. South Korea instituted the direct popular presidential election system in 1987. Religion became a powerful political force capable of creating its own authority as seen in the cases of Presidents Kim Young-sam and church elder Lee Myung-bak. Protestants made an all-out effort to create a Christian president (Baek 2014). Baek argues that a religion can project its power by backing and contributing toward making its candidate president.

Kim Young-sam ran as a candidate for the opposition Unification Democratic Party in the 1987 presidential election but lost. He ran again as a candidate for the ruling Democratic Party of Korea in the 1992 presidential election. The Protestant community highlighted the fact that he was an elder at the Chunghyeon Church and supported Kim Young-sam's election campaign behind the scenes. It also developed "a private Protestant organization called the 'Country Love Council', which had regional headquarters in about 170 locations across the country" (J. Lee 2022, para. 14). Pastor Cho Yong-gi openly supported Kim as a presidential candidate. Furthermore, he preached that Christians should serve as members of the National Assembly and elders should serve as president. In the process, the Protestant community spread "'Christian entry theory' or the 'Presbyterian presidential theory,'" in which an elder of a Protestant church (most likely a mega church) should become president. This argument gained significant momentum in mobilizing the votes of conservative members of Protestant churches (J. Lee 2022). In the end, these Christian presidents treated the Protestant leaders who supported their campaign at the levels of "contributor to founding the nation" and "meritorious scholar" (J. Lee 2022).

In the 17th presidential election, Protestant churches made an all-out effort to make Seoul Presbyterian Somang megachurch elder Lee Myung-bak president. The effort seemed to be successful in the end, despite all the high-profile scandals incriminating him. The Park Geun-hye administration also used Protestants for her political career and so-called church connections emerged again during her presidential campaign. During her administration, "the words 'Somang Church' and 'Sarang Church' [another Seoul Presbyterian megachurch] 'are rising' were sometimes circulated. Of the 12 senior secretaries at the Blue House [South Korea's equivalent of the US White House], 8 were Protestants, but none were Buddhists or Catholics" (Hong 2014, para. 8).

Kenya's Protestant Churches and Multi-Party Politics of 1991

Over 50 percent of the world's Quakers are found in western Kenya, particularly among the Luhya tribe (Haverford College n.d., Rasmussen 1994). The mission churches in Kenya have been highly successful. Originally, the Anglican and Presbyterian missions (respectively the Gospel Missionary Society, (GMS), and the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) were conservative evangelicals, emphasizing conversion and personal salvation, but they were weak on social involvement (Wamagatta 2001). All these Christian missions were centered in the Kikuyu tribe's heartland of Central Kenya, and it meant that the Kikuyu were best placed to benefit from the education provided by the missions. Naturally, the core of these churches, as well as their first African leadership, were Kikuyu.

Kenya's Christian mission churches' direct involvement in societal changes was weak at the time. Yet, Kikuyu churches provided "a ritually sanctioned skill necessary for the local communities to continue local politics with other means" (Lonsdale 1999, 213). Subclans dedicated land and labor to building mission outschools and, within a decade of the first

baptism, “unlettered populations were content to be ruled by young Christian chiefs” (Lonsdale 2001, 171). Missionaries experienced an exponential increase in locals’ subscribing to Christianity, as evidenced in “1915-16 when the annual sale of scripture portions increased from 755 to over 10,000, at 30 cents each, a day's pay” (Lonsdale 1999, 213).

Mission churches’ involvement in Kenya’s social change has grown over time, as seen by the creation of many indigenous churches in the 1930s as a result of missionary opposition to female circumcision—the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (Pew Research Center 2010). The involvement of Christianity in the Mau Mau emergency (1952–56) seems to be highlighted when Anglican Bishop Leonard Beecher wrote in his foreword “It was the Christian church in Kikuyu land which was the main target of terrorist attack” (Wiseman 1958, 5).

Because these early mission churches lacked nationalist credentials, after Independence in 1963 the mission churches in Kenya kept themselves in the background. They played less significant roles political during President Jomo Kenyatta’s administration (Gifford 2009b). Daniel arap Moi, from the Kalenjin tribe, came to power in 1978. His agenda was to demote the Kikuyu power circle around Jomo Kenyatta and replace it with his own mainly Kalenjin supporters. Moi’s effort put the Kikuyu-dominated mission churches on the defensive (Gifford 2009b). President Moi himself was a prominent member of the Africa Inland Church (AIC), a mission church centered among the Kamba and Kalenjin tribes in the Rift Valley (Gifford 2009b). As Moi attempted to garner Kenyans to walk in his *nyayo* (footsteps), as opposed to Kenyatta’s *nyayo*, Moi had to coopt the support of AICs (Gifford 2009b). Daniel arap Moi called Kenya a “single party democracy” (Nepstad 2012, para. 1). The one-party state centralized power and subordinated parliament and ministers

David Tarus (Tarus 2022) examined the role of the church in addressing the problem of ethnopolitical conflict in Kenya from 1982 to 2013. He highlights the significance of the 1982 attempted coup. Although it was not successful, the coup heightened opposition against Moi’s rule and defined the church’s relationship with government. From 1982 to 2002, the period witnessed a generally unified Kenyan church fighting against social injustice, including tribalism (Tarus 2022). Protestant bishops teamed up to push for justice, democracy, and ethnic cohesion, especially during the years preceding the introduction of a multiparty political system in Kenya (Tarus 2022).

In 1986, churchmen started to involve themselves seriously in politics as they opposed Moi’s *mlolongo*, or queue-voting, where supporters lined up in front of a picture of their chosen candidates (Gifford 2009b). Prominent church leaders, the Reverend Timothy Dr. of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), Bishop Zablon Nthamburi of the Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK), and Bishops John Henry Okullu, Alexander Kipsang Muge, and Archbishops Manasses Kuria, and David Gitari of the Church Province of Kenya (CPK) opposed the Moi regime in pushing for “social justice, cohesion, and democracy in Kenya” (Tarus 2022; *Weekly Review* 1994b, 5–6; 1994a, 3–5; 1990a 3–6; 1990c, 6–9). “The Catholic Church had, at the beginning, hesitated to join the rest of the clergy in the clamour for change”

(Parsitau n.d., 2). During the 1988 general elections, Bishop Gitari “proved the government’s rigging of the elections by filming the queues in his diocese” (Gifford 2009a, 140).

These church leaders continuously and tirelessly attacked the Moi regime in the form of “political sermons using Scripture” (Press 2002). On the forefront of preaching for multi-party politics was Timothy Njoya, who preached a sermon in favor of multi-party democracy on January 1, 1990, and he was followed by Bishop Okullu (Press 2002). Bishop Njoya while preaching for multi-party politics, preached against patronage and tribalism (*Weekly Review* 1990a, 3). Bishop Gitari also preached a sermon of condemnation of the government for the assassination of J. M. Kariuki and a sermon against land grabbers, among many other issues (*Weekly Review* 1990a, 3).

The National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK), under its General Secretary, the Methodist Rev. Samuel Kobia, was involved heavily in politics as an institution (Parsitau n.d.). It coordinated the collective action of all influential churches and operated the biggest development oriented non-governmental organization (NGO). NCCCK leaders had urged the Kenya African National Union (KANU) political party “to find an alternative method” of voting to mlolongo or otherwise they would ask Kenyan Christians to refrain from taking part in elections (Oluoch 2006, 85–86). To challenge the NCCCK, Moi pressured the AIC and others to leave the NCCCK. The Moi regime branded these religious leaders “members of *Mwakenya* (the underground political movement) and messengers of foreign masters” (Tarus 2022, 28, quoting Gitari 2014, 240).

As Njoya, Gitari, Muge and Okullu attempted to fight against Moi’s repression, their operations are understood differently (Sabar-Friedman 1997). Noya and Gitari were Kikuyu tribesmen, thereby keen toward maintaining Kikuyu dominance in politics (Sabar-Friedman 1997). Okullu was from the Luo tribe, and he was open to promoting Luo’s interests. Muge, a member of the ethnic Luhya group, opposed the Kikuyu hegemony in both church and state while being caught up in the ethnic politics of his western region (Stamp 1991). Naturally enough, bishops had disagreement on the issue of multi-party politics around ethnic fault lines. Bishop Lawi Imathiu of the MCK and Bishop Muge of the CPK issued a joint press statement supporting one-party rule (Tarus 2022; *Weekly Review* 1990b, 23). They condemned the multi-party system with the reason that it would precipitate ethnic conflicts in Kenya. Because of this division within NCCCK, there was a harsh criticism that:

The NCCCK in Kenya is like a rotten apple. To the best of my knowledge, the NCCCK has nothing to lecture our nation because all the evils, which eat our nation such as tribalism, favoritism, nepotism, and other-isms, have found shape in NCCCK. (Crouch 1993, *Weekly Review* 1985, 5–7)

Beginning in 1989, Okullu, Gitari and Njoya pressed for the repeal of the 1982 clause mandating the one-party state. These efforts eventually led to pressure for wider constitutional reform with the end goal of eliminating the provisions that permitted Moi’s

authoritarianism all together (Oluoch 2003). The collusion between religious groups with other civic groups happened at this time, as the Law Society of Kenya supported this dramatic constitutional reform (Throup 1993). In following suit, politicians like Kenneth Matiga and Charles Rubia joined this pro-democracy movement. Moi's KANU review commission formed to review this demand included figures like the former Presbyterian Moderator John Gatu and Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Church. The review recommended retaining the one-party state (Gifford 2009b).

Gifford (2009b) argues that this somewhat decentralized religious activism, mainly around ethnic fault lines, started to have a united front when Catholic leaders, notably the Bishop of Nakuru, Rafael Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki (chairman of the Episcopal Conference at the time), became hesitantly involved. In February 1992, the Roman Catholic bishops issued a joint statement condemning KANU rule as a hazard to the genuine evolution of democracy in Kenya (Tarus 2022 and *Weekly Review* 1992). On March 22, 1992, eighteen Roman Catholic bishops issued another pastoral letter accusing the government of being complicit in the violent ethnic clashes prevalent in parts of western Kenya since October 1991 (Tarus 2022; *Weekly Review* 1992c, 20). Similarly, Bishop Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki condemned the *Meteitei* ethnic strife of 1991 and the *Molo* clashes of 1992. He articulated that these tragic happenings were orchestrated by the government's irresponsible statements made in the locales of Kapsabet, Kapkatet, Kericho, and Narok (Tarus 2022 and "The Nandi Clashes, 'a Very Dirty Affair'" 1991, 19). Likewise, Bishop Manasses Kuria declared that all peace-loving Kenyans should resist politicians who attempt to capitalize on ethnicity for personal gains. Bishop Cornelius Korir of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Eldoret and Bishop Longinus Atundo of the Bungoma Diocese condemned ethnic-based violence in the Rift Valley and western provinces (Tarus 2022; *Weekly Review* 1992d, 16; 1992a, 19).

All these Catholic leaders' voices were heard as a unified voice, and it was evinced when the outspoken weekly *Society* put Cardinal Otunga on its cover for the week of the pastoral, over the caption "Final Showdown" (Gifford 2009b, 37). The publication stated that "the [Catholic] bishops speak in one voice and unlike some church denominations they cannot be 'bought'..., and unlike the other denominations, feuds in the Catholic Church are rare, if they ever occur" (Chege 1992, 6). Catholic bishops considered this attempt of condemnation as the last straw that broke the camel's back (Moi Government) (Njoka 1992).

Multi-party politics were eventually legalized in December 1991, and the roles of the churches in politics in Kenya has become complex. They appear to be united and heightened in their role but divided at the same time. The Catholic Meongdong Cathedral that became a symbol for sacred ground for South Korean student protest groups. Analogously, In March 1992, the "Mothers of Political Prisoners" held a hunger strike in Nairobi's Uhuru Park and was violently repressed by the Moi government's police forces (Gowi 2022, para. 1). Then, the mothers regrouped at the Anglican All Saints Cathedral which was located one block away from Uhuru Park. The government prohibited the mothers from returning to their

previous location (by then christened “Freedom Corner”) (Gowi 2022, para. 11). The Mothers continued their campaign over the next 11 months. Through this protest, All Saints Cathedral became a shrine of resistance to KANU, heightening the profile of the churches as the political opposition (Kapinde 2018).

Around the common goal of repealing Moi’s one-party state constitution, the NCKK and the Catholic Church formed the National Ecumenical Civic Education Program (NECEP). It aimed to provide civic education to Kenyan voters and politicians under the chairmanship of Bishop Henry Okullu (Okullu 1993, 151). It coordinated two inter-party symposiums in May and June of 1992 (*Weekly Review* 1992h, 3; 1992f, 16; 1992e). It formed the National Election Monitoring Unit (NEMU), with the purpose of monitoring the December 29, 1992, General Election (Okullu 1993, 152). These efforts were a massive commitment, with extensive international engagement (Carver 1994) by these religious institutions (Tarus 2022). The NCKK also produced “A Kairos for Kenya” and dealt with issues of KANU nomination rules, election rules, and code of discipline including the reflection of a national agenda set by the people of Kenya in detail (“A Kairos for Kenya” in Leonard 2010). It was highly unradical, often compared to South Africa’s Kairos Document (1985) used to rally support for the overthrow of the apartheid government (NCKK, “A Kairos for Kenya: NCKK Reflections on the KANU Review Committee Report and the KANU Special Delegates’ Conference Resolutions on it, Nairobi: NCKK” (1991). It did contain NCCA’s resolution not to separate church matters from state:

The NCKK is deeply committed to development, peace, justice, and participatory democracy, social justice and participatory democracy. Since its inception, the Council [NCKK] has strongly advocated for human rights, social justice for all, unity of all Kenyans, and the rule of law.

Social justice and the equitable distribution of wealth for all Kenyans are as much a part of the Gospel we are called upon to declare as is the message of salvation to every individual soul. Our job is not to be concerned with politics or economics for its own sake, but with character and personality which cannot be developed except in an environment in which the political scheme and the economic framework are in accordance with the Divine will. The methods we adopt in the effect to transform men and women through the power of Christ must be adjusted to the new conditions that will confront them, the new rights that they will be called upon to carry [*sic*]. (“A Kairos for Kenya” in Leonard 2010, 238)

Despite this overall effort to unite their operations, disunity and division within the pro-democracy religious became a reason for Moi’s winning the 1992 presidential elections. There was an outbreak of internal scandals such as accusations of sexual misbehavior in the case of

some leaders, including Bishop Girtari. Muge's old diocese of Eldoret experienced a serious ethnic division as the dominant Nandi tribe refused to accept a Pokot bishop (Gifford 2009b). When Gitari was elected as the Archbishop of Kenya, there were legitimate concerns over his drinking habits and possible sexual promiscuity (Omondi 1998). Like Muge's Eldoret based diocese, Kajiado county had a scandalous level of division within the diocese: the Maasai tribe rejected the election of Rev. Bernard Njoroge, a Kikuyu, from being the first bishop of the newly created Kajiado Diocese, threatening that fresh tribal clashes would erupt in Kajiado if Njoroge is chosen (*Weekly Review* 1993a, 14; 1993b, 12–14). Eventually, after two years of resistance, the Maasai Christians finally had Reverend Jeremiah Taama, "one of their own," as the Bishop (Tarus 2022, 34).

President Moi's administration is known for orchestrating this division and disunity. "President Moi managed to manipulate the demands and processes through different strategies including ethnicity, use of violence, arrests, detentions and also co-optation" while accepting minimum reforms in the constitution as the 1997 election approached (Musau 2020, para. 8). Moi was especially successful in dividing the churchmen from the activist NGOs during the run up to the election. The Catholics too readily accepted the election results causing friction with the pro-democracy NGOs (Kapinde 2018).

Evangelical groups were a significant constituency in this overall dissonant response to Moi's cooptation moves (Ong'or 2022). These formations are sometimes viewed as either "loyalists" that allied themselves with the Moi regime versus "apolitical" institutions that have largely kept aloof from politics (Karanja 2008, 70). Evangelical churches, which stayed away from social issues during Moi's time, invoked spiritual issues as their priority. As a result, they chose not to be part of pro-democratic movements spearheaded by Protestant and Catholic churches (Tarus 2022). They considered the NCKK to be socially oriented and preferred to work with the Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya (EFK), now called the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK) (Tarus 2022). Reverend Arthur Kitonga, of the Redeemed Gospel Church, believed that the NCKK's public engagement was an example of a serious loss of spiritual vision (*Weekly Review* 1992e, 1992g). Eventually, the evangelical church groups were divided into loyalists versus apolitical groups. It encouraged sectarian politics against the NCKK (Oluoch 2006; *Weekly Review* 1992g, 1992e). Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the RGC (Redeemed Gospel Church) urged Kenyan Christians to be obedient to the government and the established political order. Bishop Japhet Omucheyi of the Overcoming Faith Church of Kenya and Father Juma Pesa of the Holy Ghost Coptic Church urged Kenyan Christians to stay away from politics (*Weekly Review* 1992g). Bishop Birech of the AIC, the prominent Moi supporter, suggested that AIC preferred to critique the government "in love" as opposed to "shouting it from the rooftops" as the NCKK does (Tarus 2022, 31). For this support, Moi is viewed to have rewarded his supporters later: John Cheruiyot, the son of former African Inland Church Bishop Ezekiel Birech, won election as MP in 1988 for the Aldai constituency and Moi appointed him "Cooperatives minister" (Cheploen and Leshan 2020, para. 22).

Relationship Between Catholic Groups and Government in South Korea

Bishop Cardinal Ji Hak-soon is mentioned as the prominent Catholic religious figure who contributed significantly to Korea's pro-democratic movement. Indignant at the corruption surrounding Wonju Cultural Broadcasting, in October 1971, a three-day rally to realize social justice and condemn corruption was held. Priests, monks, and laypeople from the diocese participated at the Wondong Cathedral in Wonju. This was a major event in which the Korean Catholic Church publicly resisted social injustice and corruption under the leadership of a bishop for the first time in Korea's activist history (Democratization Movement Memorial Society, n.d.). Bishop Ji was also arrested for announcing in front of domestic and foreign reporters a declaration of conscience that (President Park Chung-hee's) Yushin Constitution is invalid (Woo 2020). He was sentenced to 15 years in prison on August 9, 1974, and the bishop's arrest and imprisonment served as an opportunity for the Korean Catholic Church to collectively seek justice (Ibid.).

A Catholic social movement group was formed in 1974. It was led by Father Ham Se-woong, Father Park Hong, and Father Oh Tae-soon. The group comprised the Catholic religious who harbored a prodemocratic ideology and progressive political stance. The media dubbed it as the Justice Realization Priests' Association (JRPA) (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, n.d.a). It was not an organization officially approved by the Catholic Church, and the group has been highly criticized by the Cardinals. Yet, it contributed significantly to creating momentum in the June Uprising in 1987.

In the midst of President Chun's repression of the media and covering up of inhumane treatment of student protestors, JRPA worked toward uncovering the Park Jong-cheol case. Park was a student at Seoul National University, and he had died from police torture while being investigated at the anti-communist branch office in Namyeong-dong at the security headquarters. The incident had already been covered by the media. Lee Boo-young (later the chairman of the Uri Party), a democracy activist and reporter who was imprisoned in Yeongdeungpo Prison at the time, realized that the truths surrounding Park's death had been fabricated. He wrote the detailed truths about the case on a piece of tissue paper while he was in prison and delivered it to the Catholic Priests' Association for Justice, making it known to the outside world ("Eye Witness" 2012). In sum, throughout the 1970s, when the existing protest groups were not effective, JRPA directly criticized Yushin and established itself as a mainstay of the religious democratization movement in Korea (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture n.d.-a). Representative activities during this period included three large-scale declarations of the state of affairs, a movement against the Yushin Constitution, and a movement to invalidate President Park's emergency measures. Ultimately, JRPA was one of the first organizations to corroborate the Gwangju Massacre (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture n.d.-b). It became known as the May 18 Democratization Movement. The Chun Doo Hwan regime had framed the massacre as the government's rightful response to a riot. JRPA, with

other civic groups, played an important role in validating the protest as a democratic movement. The JRPA’s uncovering the truths of Park Jong Cheol case became a starting point of the June 1987 Uprising.

Relationship Between Catholic Groups and Government in Kenya

Similar to Korea’s cases, Kenya’s Catholic Church has a significant historical role as it expanded its public space over the years. Gifford (2009b) is keen to emphasize that Kenya’s Catholic Church uses its international influence and vast resources to build its national profile. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Kenya maintained a high national profile in the form of pastoral letters of the Kenya Episcopal Conference, and they have been widely covered by the media. According to Gifford (2009b, 57), there have been a plethora of politically and economically salient issues on which individual local bishops and the Archbishop of Nairobi had commented:

Table 1: Kenyan Church Social Commentary

▪ constitutional referendum	▪ (Nation, 18 Nov. 2005, 20)
▪ constitutional review process	▪ (Nation, 29 Sept. 2006)
▪ failure to fight corruption	▪ (Nation, 1 May 2006, 4)
▪ lack of action on Anglo-Leasing case	▪ (Nation, 26, Sept. 2006, 4)
▪ need to sack tainted ministers	▪ (Standard, 1 Feb. 2006, 4)
▪ need to prosecute politicians inciting violence	▪ (Standard 14 Nov. 2006, 6)
▪ failure to disclose the truth about the Artur brothers scandal	▪ (Standard, 16 June 2006, 3)
▪ demanding action over Mount Elgon land clashes	▪ (Nation, 21 April 2007, 40)
▪ against a Media Bill	▪ (Standard, 9 Aug. 2007, 10)
▪ the qualities the bishops want to see in political candidates	▪ (Nation, 16 Aug. 2007, 14)
▪ need for a complete overhaul of the constitution	▪ (Standard, 9 May 2007, 10; Nation, 9 May 2007, 2)
▪ government responsibility for famine in the north	▪ (Nation, 27 Dec. 2005, 32)
▪ amnesty for those who looted public resources	▪ (Standard, 9, Oct. 2006, 4)
▪ free and fair elections	▪ (Nation, 27 Aug. 2007, 7)
▪ need to sack the security minister for his failure to address insecurity	▪ (Standard, 12 May 2007, 3)
▪ Support for a bill creating 50 special parliamentary seats for women	▪ (Nation, 15 Aug. 2007, 62)

Recently, Kenya's Catholic Church has been keen to criticize partisan political bickering and conflict. Nyeri county Catholic Archbishop Anthony Muheria has cautioned that the ruling and opposition parties have been both going against the Constitution, and this unconstitutional behavior "put Kenya at risk of anarchy" (Mungai 2018, para. 1). Muheria spoke against a political crisis after opposition leader Raila Odinga was sworn in as the "people's president" (Mungai 2018, para. 2). The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) has similarly warned against double talk and mockery around the bipartisan talks by top politicians (Gitonga 2023). The bishops warned against runaway graft, impunity, extra-judicial killings and failure to respect the Constitution during the 23rd anniversary of the murder of Father John Antony Kaiser (when Father Kaiser's body was found, he was allegedly bearing papers he planned to give to the Akiwumi Commission on land clashes as evidence). Gifford mentions that Kenya's Anglican and Presbyterian statements followed suit as they were like the Catholic statements in form and tone (Gifford 2009b).

In the expanding public space Kenya's Catholic Church operated and spoke in unison because of its hierarchical structure. Other religious leaders such as Anglican Bishops Henry Okullu, Alexander Muge and David Gitari, and the Presbyterian Timothy Njoya did not operate in unison (Gifford 2009b). Therefore, the KCCB's challenges to the incumbent regime against corruption, economic failure, political violence, and repression were spoken and received by the public in uniform fashion. In the process, the public started to accord moral superiority to the Church and the religious. This is evident when Retired Archbishop Eliud Wabukala headed the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) for many years. Chairman Retired Archbishop Wabukala addressed participants at the launch of an Integrity Club. He emphasized that Kenya's main problem is "corruption [as it] remains a serious impediment to societal progress in all spheres; whether social, economic or political" (Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, n.d., para. 2).

The Catholic Church in Kenya seems to take a more neutral stake against partisan politics. Yet during the Kibaki regime (during the years 2003 to 2007), a group of Catholic bishops, rooted in the Central Province, was perceived to form a bloc sympathetic to "Kibaki and Kikuyu-Embu-Meru political aspirations" (Gifford 2009b, 59). Kibaki was Catholic and this sympathetic political orientation seems natural. However, this ruling regime-sympathetic Catholic group was somewhat neutralized by alliances in opposition party strongholds. Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth of Kisumu promoted views prevailing in the Luo tribal community. The 2005 Kenya Referendum on the Constitution proved that Kenya's politics work around these ethnic/tribal fault lines (Andreassen and Tostensen 2006). In this political context, the Catholic church came under attack. Cardinal Njue, coming from Kibaki's Central Province heartland, favored President Kibaki's stance as Kibaki was facing a political challenge from opponent Raila Odinga (Mungai 2021). Cardinal Njue even declared that a *majimbo* (federal, regional, or devolved) system would be disastrous for the country (Gifford 2009b). When Archbishop Okoth of Kisumu challenged Cardinal Njue's personal view,

Okoth was seen as siding with opposition group leader Odinga who supported devolution (Gifford 2009b). Therefore, the division among the Catholic religious around ethnic fault lines became extremely pronounced.

At this point, there is a big difference between Korea versus Kenya's Catholic Churches. Korea's Catholic Church has worked on specific issues such as rejecting President Park's Yushin Constitution, revealing truths about Park Jong Chul's death and validating Gwangju uprising as a democratic movement. Kenya's Catholic Church is perceived as giving general and somewhat hollow moral leadership against corruption and political violence. Gifford (2009b) suggests that enablers are not mentioned, and specifics are avoided in these letters and exhortations. In the end, Catholic religious only solidified opposing political views as they continuously operated around fault lines.

Aftermath in South Korea

After the people's democratic movement in 1987, Korea's Protestant churches have experienced a more pronounced division along bipartisan politics. This division culminated with the inception of Christian Council of Korea (CCK), also called Han Gi Chong. Although Han Gi Chong was founded in 1989, its roots date back to the 1960s (Human Seat 2013). In 1968, President Park Chung-hee was pushing for a presidential three-term constitutional amendment. The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) (pro democratic) opposed the three-term constitutional amendment. The Korean Christian Association (KCA), also called *daehangidokyeonhap*, supported Park's three-term constitutional amendment for the sake of national stability (Human Seat 2013). The KCA became a basis for Han Gi Chong (Human Seat 2013). Han Gi Chong started to exert its somewhat extremist rightist vent as Korea's presidency passed into the opposition party leader's presidential administration. It strongly demanded that the government should eradicate pro-North Korea leftists and expel corruption as it viewed that Korea's nascent democracy is shaken by pro North Korean and leftist politicians.

Korea's Protestant right wing group has not operated any differently from an aspiring political group. The group does not hold any strong religious views and their stance is proven to be purely a political move as they see some opening in Korea's political opportunity structure. It is important to note that Han Gi Chong is anti-North Korea, not anti-communist, and its anti-North Korean rhetoric has been domineering over any other views and issues. Han Gi Chong has not operated any differently than political parties that embody the extremist rightwing politics of the ruling party before the 1987 People's democratic movement. Pastor Kwang-Hoon Jeon, who was elected as the president of Han Gi Chong in early 2019, immediately entered an anti-Moon Jae-in administration campaign. Pastor Jeon characterized Moon Jae-in's administration as North Korea's Juche regime and demanded

Moon's resignation with the accusation that Moon's administration is attempting to hand over South Korea to North Korea (Y. Lee 2019).

Han Gi Chong has been criticized for its pro right wing and pro authoritarian regime before the democratization. At the time of its establishment, there was a rumor that the Chun Doo-hwan regime had created the Christian Council of Korea to keep in check anti-establishment Christian forces such as the NCKK in Kenya (S. Lee 2005; Ryu 2010). According to Pastor Han Myeong-su (elder of Changhun University Church), who served as the first general secretary of Han Gi Chong:

I hear shameful stories about the distribution of bribes rampant during presidential elections. Some criticize the Han Gi Chong [Christian Council of Korea] for being infested with cults and sects. This is because many unverified denominations and organizations have also joined (over the years). These denominations and organizations must join Han Gi Chong to be recognized by the church community and become legitimate, so they try to join at all costs...In addition, there are concerns about Han Gi Chong's excessive rightward shift. Prayer meetings and rallies hosted by Han Gi Chong dismiss the North Korean regime as Satan, call for the overthrow of [then North Korean leader] Kim Jong-il, and call for strengthening the ROK-US alliance. Moreover, (the group's) waving the American flag appears to be excessive dependence on foreign powers. (Ryu 2010).

Aftermath in Kenya

From President Kibaki's administration and forward, churches started to experience more disunity. The NCKK changed its stance from "principled opposition" during the Moi administration to "principled cooperation" toward Kibaki's (Gifford 2009b, 43). The NCKK under the leadership of the General Secretary, Reverend Mutava Musyimi had proposed a merger between NCKK and the Parliamentary Review Team for the constitutional review process. The group was referred to as "Ufungamano Initiative" after the Ufungamano House, a church-owned premise, as the venue for their meetings (Tarus 2022, 35). However, the Ufungamano initiative unraveled with the criticism that Musyimi's personal ambitions and goals overrode the churches' unified goal (Mati 2012).

President Kibaki appointed Reverend Mutava Musyimi as leader of the Steering Committee on Anticorruption. The latter won a parliamentary seat on the president's party soon after resigning from NCKK. This case can be viewed as a political party's cooptation of a religious leader to enhance its political influence (Tarus 2022). A similar cooption happened when Raila Odinga of the newly formed Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) brought in Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, a prominent televangelist with a larger followership (Tarus 2022). Wanjiru later won a parliamentary seat on the ODM party.

Newspaper articles such as “The Church is Not Our Voice Anymore” (Adams Oloo, Standard, 5 Nov. 2006, 16f), “No Longer the Beacon of Political Morality” (George Ogola, Standard, 15 Sept. 2006, 13), “The Church at a Crossroads” (Otsieno Namwaya, Standard, 6 Aug. 2006), “Heal Yourselves First, Dear Clerics” (Lucy Oriang, Nation, 8 Sept. 2006), “Lobby Groups Have Lost Drive for Change” (Bonfas Oduor Owinga, Nation, 24 Aug. 2006) exemplify the public’s general feeling that the churches are compromised, divided and indecisive during the run up to 2007 presidential elections (Grifford 2009b). The NCKK publicly apologized regarding the 2007 post-election violence that the churches took sides in the run up to the elections. Editorials lamented a lack of trust toward churches in public opinion with titles such as “Ethnicity in the Church Comes of Age” (Erick Wamanji, Standard, 27 Feb. 2008), “Church’s Worrying Slide to Silence” (Dennis Onyangno, Standard 27 Jan. 2008 24f), “Is the Catholic Leadership Facing a Credibility Crisis?” (Henry Makori, Nation, 12 March 2008, 10), “Political Bishops Betraying the People” (Elias Mokua Nyatete, Standard, 23 Jan. 2008 7) and “Clerics Are Caught in a Partisan Time Warp” (Okech Kendo, Standard, 27 March 2008, 6).

Cooptation of Religious Groups by Political Parties

South Korea Today

The symbiotic relationship between sect groups and government in Korea has been highlighted in the interviews conducted with reporter Byun who covered the Shincheonji church for years (Kwan 2020). He has been covering the Shincheonji issue for 15 years since 2006. Byun had interviews with Shincheonji Leader Lee Man-hee and mentioned the connection between Shincheonji and politics, especially political parties. He said, “In 2007, Shincheonji’s Lee Man Hee ordered all of its members to join the Grand National Party,” and “some executives of Shincheonji held important party positions and participated in the presidential campaign” (Kwan 2020). In 2007, it was revealed that Shincheonji issued a document called “Shincheonji’s External Activities Cooperation Notice” to twelve parishes across the country and instructed 10,670 believers to join the Grand National Party as special members (Kwan 2020). Then, in 2012, controversy arose when it was known that Shincheonji’s senior elder Mr. Hwang was a standing advisor to the Saenuri Party and worked as chairman of the Administrative Autonomy Organization Committee for then presidential candidate Park Geun-hye’s camp (Y. Kang and Oh 2020). The Shincheonji Church of Jesus and its leader reemerged on the South Korean media scene as the site of the first major outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus in February 2020 (Korea Times 2022).

This type of symbiotic relationship between Korea’s presidents with new religious groups that are defined as being a sect by mainstream religious groups tends to be secretive. This is due to the fear that if the relationship between the two is revealed, the involved political party may lose many votes and support from the mainstream religions (J. Lee 2022). The new non-

mainstream religions or sect groups need protection of the government for them to grow. The desire of the presidential candidate to coopt enormous campaign funds and votes from the religions group is high, so the connection between religion and politics is difficult to break (J. Lee 2022). The 2022 murder of former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe spotlighted the South Korea-based Unification Church's multinational partisan network supporting hard right factions (Adelstein 2022).

Kenya Today

In a similar way, Kenya's religious community has a history of deep relationships with political parties. During Advent of December 2023, Reverend Canon Dr. Sammy Wainaina, advisor on Anglican communion affairs, focused his criticism on the current presidential administration (Spice FM 2023). He acknowledged that the public perceived William Ruto's presidential campaign as having "ominously packaged itself as an "act of God" and a "product of prayer" (Gekara 2023). It is public knowledge that the evangelical wing of the Kenyan Christian community stakes considerable claim to Ruto's presidency, and Ruto's party has a symbiotic relationship with the evangelicals to whom he has been giving out money (Gekara 2023). Reverend Wainaina described the relationship between state and church as a paradoxical one in which leaders from both communities vie for influence and power (Spice FM 2023). He voiced his criticism toward the religious leaders who benefit from politics at the individual and corporate levels and operate as "brokers" in mobilization of crowds for political purpose (Spice FM 2023).

For the 2022 presidential campaign and forward, the religious community has been criticized for churches becoming a podium for politicians spreading hatred, division, discord and blatant lies (Gekara 2023). Right before the 2022 presidential elections, Reverend Canon Chris Kinyanjui, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches, had an interview with Al Jazeera (Egbejule 2022). He criticized that both the Kwanza and Azimio parties invoked God's name in vain to win the election. "Stop pretending to be his [Jesus'] deputy on earth," Martha Karua, the former justice minister and running mate of presidential candidate Raila Odinga, said in Swahili at a rally (Wanjohi 2022, para. 4). Bishop Elizabeth Thuiya, founder of the Delta Prophetic Latter Ministries, has been campaigning for Raila Odinga's victory as she "prophesied" that the Holy Spirit told her Raila will win and rejected Ruto (Mwenesi 2022, para. 3). A delegation from the Holy Ghost Church of East Africa, also known as Akorinos, a small conservative sect based mostly in West and Central Kenya, attended an interdenominational rally to show their support for Raila Odinga ahead of August 9, 2022, polls (Egbejule 2022). Of the other two front-line contenders for the presidency, David Mwaure was a bishop.

Reverend Kinyanjui reasoned this highly Christianity-charged presidential campaign with the fact that more than 86 percent of Kenya's estimated 56 million people are Christians

in a constitutionally secular state (Office of International Religious Freedom 2022). Because elections are a number game after all, political parties in Kenya have a natural tendency to feverishly coopt the Christian leaders and churches during the campaigns.

Conclusion

Compared to the Protestant churches, the Catholic church operated differently as the democratic movement and constitutional reform for multi-party politics became a pivotal point. Korea's Catholic church provided more need-based activism through JRPA as it directly criticized the Yushin Constitution, vindicated the Gwangju uprising as a democratic movement and uncovered the Park Jong-cheol torture case. In the expanding public space Kenya's Catholic Church operated and spoke with unity and unified other fronts from the different denominations. However, Kenya's Catholic Church has taken a more neutral stake against partisan politics during the Kibaki regime, and the 2005 Kenya Referendum on the Constitution proved that Kenya's religious groups including the Catholic church worked around ethnic/tribal fault lines.

After the people's democratic movement in 1987, Korea's Protestant churches have experienced a more pronounced division along partisan political fault lines. This division culminated with the inception of Han Gi Chong. As the religious group started to exert its somewhat extremist rightist vent in favor of the conservative parties, it has not operated any differently from a fanatical political group with anti-North Korea rhetoric. In Kenya's case, after the single party politics is dismantled, there has been a high level of cooptation between the religious and politics. President Kibaki appointed Reverend Mutava Musyimi for a government position and Raila Odinga of the then Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) brought in Bishop Margaret Wanjiru for a parliamentary seat.

The somewhat secret symbiotic relationship between Korea's presidents exists with new religious groups that are defined as being a sect by mainstream religious groups. It involves the political party's desire to garner more votes and the sect leader's attempt to legitimize and popularize its group through government support. Similarly, the relationship between state and church in Kenya became a paradoxical one in which leaders from both communities vie for influence and power.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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