

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Yonhap - Repeated Allegations Create Bias

Knut Holdhus
August 14, 2025



South Korean Politics: HQ of People Power Party (PPP) being raided by special prosecutors

In coverage of raids on main opposition party, South Korean Yonhap News Agency displays blatant bias emphasizing unproven allegations, not obvious lack of evidence

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On [13th](#) and [14th August](#) 2025, Yonhap News Agency published two articles detailing actions by South Korea's special counsel team investigating former first lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희), with mention of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)).



The reports describe raids on the main opposition People Power Party (PPP - 국민의힘) headquarters as part of a probe into alleged bribery, political interference, and illegal political donations. Central to the narrative is the claim that a [federation](#) official, alongside an individual described as a "shaman" linked to Kim, sought to have [federation](#) members join the PPP to sway its 2023 leadership race.

The first article ([13th Aug.](#)) outlines the scope of the investigation: prosecutors allege that Jeon Seong-bae (전성배), a shaman associated with Kim, and a [Family Federation](#) official surnamed Yoon exchanged text messages about the support of then-President Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열) for PPP lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동).

They allegedly coordinated to influence the party leadership contest in Kweon's favor and that Yoon sought government backing for the [federation](#). Prosecutors also allege Yoon provided political funds to Kweon and others since 2021. Both Kweon and the [Family Federation](#) have publicly denied any illegal transactions or donations.



PPP lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong Dec. 23, 2024.



Former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, here in a meeting at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C. April 27, 2023

The second article ([14th Aug.](#)) details how the special counsel failed to obtain the PPP's membership list during the raid, encountering strong resistance from the party. The investigators reportedly intended to cross-reference party rosters with [federation](#) membership records to confirm mass sign-ups, but deny seeking the entire membership list. Again, both Kweon and the [Family Federation](#) maintain their denials of any wrongdoing.

From a media bias perspective, the [13th August](#) piece by Yonhap is what is called "front-loaded". Within the first two sentences, the article identifies the [Family Federation](#) in connection to a bribery probe and political interference.

The same can be said for the [14th August](#) report. Again, early in the article, the [federation](#) is linked to "allegations" about influencing PPP's leadership race.

Early placement of the [federation](#) in proximity to "bribery," "raid," and "interference" primes the reader to associate the institution with misconduct before denials are presented.

The [federation's](#) denial of illegal donations in the [13th August](#) article appears in paragraph 8 - similar for the article [the day after](#) - well after several paragraphs of allegations.

Readers may retain the stronger emotional impact of initial allegations rather than later denials.

The sequencing of the two Yonhap articles ensures the reader is repeatedly reminded of allegations, while the absence of new evidence is given less narrative weight.

Across both articles, several key phrases are repeated, such as "[church](#) official", "mass sign-ups", "bribery allegations", "influence the leadership race"

Even without proof, repetition helps cement these associations in the reader's mind. In media framing theory, this is known as availability bias - people recall repeated terms more readily, increasing perceived likelihood of truth.

FATES OF SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENTS

Syngman Rhee (in office 1948-1960) – **Exile in Hawaii until death**

Yun Bo-seon (1960-1962) – **Convicted of treason**

Park Chung-hee (1963-1979) – **Assassinated**

Choi Kyu-hah (1979-1980) – **Forced out by coup**

Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988) – **Death sentence, pardoned**

Roh Tae-woo (1988-1993) – **Jailed, pardoned**

Kim Young-sam (1993-1998) – **Son jailed**

Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) – **Aides investigated**

Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) – **Suicide during probe**

Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) – **Jailed, pardoned**

Park Geun-hye (2013-2017) – **Impeached, jailed, pardoned**

Moon Jae-in (2017-2022) – **Aides probed**

Yoon Suk-yeol (2022-2025) – **Impeached, removed from office**

South Korea has a long, almost uncanny pattern of post-presidency trouble - enough that some Koreans

joke there's a "curse" on the Blue House. Each new administration often tries to "clean house" by prosecuting the previous one. The presidency in South Korea has immense influence, making both abuse and backlash more likely. This has created a cycle: leaders push legal or moral boundaries while in office, then political opponents pursue them once they step down.

The articles technically maintain journalistic caution with words like "allegedly," but their structure, selective details, and framing lean toward presumption of institutional involvement.

Analysis

These reports highlight an investigative narrative that risks conflating allegation with established fact, while relying heavily on prosecutorial claims rather than independently verified evidence. Several points are important to understand the real situation:

Absence of Proven Illegality

The reports repeatedly acknowledge that the [Family Federation](#) has denied making any illegal donations or providing improper political support. At this stage, the investigation appears to rest largely on testimony from individuals under arrest or investigation, such as the "[church](#) official" and the shaman. In criminal proceedings, such testimony is often scrutinized for bias, self-preservation motives, or plea-bargaining incentives. Until corroborated by independent, material evidence, these remain unproven allegations.

Lack of Direct Evidence in Media Reports

Neither article cites direct documentary or forensic evidence showing that the [Family Federation](#) as an institution orchestrated political interference. References to text messages are made in passing without providing transcripts or context, and there is no confirmation that such communications were authorized or coordinated by [federation](#) leadership. Without such proof, claims risk being perceived as guilt by association.



Lee Jae-myung, President of South Korea since 4th June 2025

Potential Political Context and Sensitivities

The alleged events involve high-profile political figures - the former first lady, a sitting lawmaker, and a past president - making this a politically charged investigation. In South Korea's contentious political climate, accusations of political interference by religious groups can be weaponized for partisan advantage. The [federation](#) has historically been a subject of public and media scrutiny, sometimes amplifying unverified claims due to pre-existing narratives.

Mass Membership Sign-up Allegation Remains Unsubstantiated

The [second article](#) makes clear that the special counsel failed to secure the PPP's membership roster, meaning they have not obtained the very data needed to confirm or disprove the alleged mass sign-ups by [federation](#) members. This underscores that, at present, the accusation remains speculative rather than evidence-based.

Importance of Distinguishing Individual Actions from Institutional Policy

Even if individuals linked to the [federation](#) acted in ways that prosecutors consider questionable, it does not automatically implicate the [organization](#) as a whole. Many large religious or civic groups have members who engage in political activity independently. Without proof of formal directives from the [federation](#)'s governing bodies, assigning institutional culpability is unwarranted.

Risk of Prejudicial Public Perception

The repeated mention of the [Family Federation](#) / [Unification Church](#) in conjunction with bribery and corruption allegations - without equivalent emphasis on the denials and lack of evidence - may shape public opinion before any judicial determination. For fairness, reporting should balance allegations with the presumption of innocence.

Conclusion

The Yonhap reports illustrate the early, contested stages of an investigation, not the conclusion of a

proven case. While prosecutors are pursuing leads involving individuals with alleged [federation](#) ties, no conclusive evidence has been presented showing institutional wrongdoing by the [Family Federation / Unification Church](#). Until such evidence emerges and withstands legal scrutiny, the [organization](#) can rightly maintain that it has not engaged in illegal political donations or interference. In the meantime, it is crucial to distinguish between allegations against individuals and the policies or actions of the [institution](#) itself, especially in a politically charged environment where reputations can be damaged long before courts render judgment.

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Churches Urged To Repent For Dissolution Role

- August 13, 2025
- Knut Holdhus

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Christian leaders in Tokyo denounce complicity of churches in persecution of Family Federation and warn dissolution order threatens Japan’s religious freedom




Tokyo, 13th August 2025 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

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by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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A meeting to discuss the problems with the [dissolution order](#) against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) was held in Tokyo on 11th August. The theme was “A Dissolution Order Threatening Freedom of Religion”. The event was organized by the Japanese Christian opinion site SALTY (Represented by Haruki Kinoshita (木下春樹), pastor of [Aboshi Christ Church](#)).

Tsutomu Nishioka (西岡力), Editor-in-Chief of SALTY and a specially appointed professor at [Reitaku University](#), along with other Christians, agreed that churches should not remain silent about the [dissolution order](#) and should apologize for their involvement in [abducting and confining Family Federation](#) members in attempts to break their faith [\[See editor's note below\]](#).

Nishioka harshly criticized the current state of Japan regarding the [dissolution order](#),

“Japan is no longer a nation under the rule of law, but a dangerous country ruled by the monster of public opinion. This is a serious challenge to the system of freedom and democracy.”



Professor **Tsutomu Nishioka**. Photo: U.S. Department of State / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#). Cropped.

In July 2022, when former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) was assassinated, “suddenly, Japanese society began persecuting the [Family Federation](#).” Nishioka said he felt something was wrong from the very beginning, and, from the conviction that “we must [not allow terrorists to achieve their goals](#),” he declared,

“Remaining silent is not what a Christian should do. Those with a normal mind should be able to see that what is happening now is abnormal.”

He revealed that he has been sounding the alarm on this issue ever since. He analyzed the background of the persecution of the [Family Federation](#), saying:

“Some in the media and certain political forces did not want to acknowledge Abe’s achievements. They deliberately aimed to eliminate opportunities to talk about his accomplishments – and that’s exactly what ended up happening.”

Nishioka also argued that the [Liberal Democratic Party](#) “went along” with the movement to discredit Abe, which in turn led then Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) to arbitrarily reinterpret the law so that alleged wrongdoings according to civil law could be included among the requirements for dissolving a religious corporation.

“The whole country was brainwashed,” Nishioka said, comparing the situation to the [Asahi Shimbun’s](#) 1990s campaign about the alleged forced recruitment of wartime “comfort women” by the former Japanese military. He recalled how the public had been deceived when the media ran in one direction and the atmosphere of the times aligned with it – just as then Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa (宮澤喜一) had apologized eight times because the social circumstances left him with no choice.



Pastor Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久) of [Christian Church of](#)



Kiichi Miyazawa (1919-2007), prime minister of Japan 1991-1993. Member of House of Representatives for LDP 1967-2003. Photo: [首相官邸ホームページ](#) / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 Int](#)

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Rev. Haruhisa Nakagawa (中川晴久) of the Christian Church of the Lord's Sheep (主の羊ヶリスチャン教会).
Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

[the Lord's Sheep](#) (Yokohama) criticized the government's decision, pointing out the human rights violations [Family Federation](#) believers have faced since the [dissolution order](#):

"Once one-sided reporting was aired, it should have been obvious that [Family Federation](#) believers would be subjected to [religious hate and harassment](#)."

Nakagawa believes part of the responsibility for the [dissolution order](#) lies with the Christian churches. He stated that there are 205 pastors confirmed to have been involved in the [abduction and confinement](#) of [Family Federation](#) believers, and if those suspected (another 85) are included, the number rises to nearly 300. The majority of plaintiffs suing the [religious organization](#) for the return of donations are former believers who abandoned the faith after such abductions, and their lawsuits directly led to the dissolution request.

He argued,

"This is the [largest human rights violation](#) in postwar Japan, and an apology alone is not enough."

Nishioka agreed:

"Even though the [dissolution order](#) is a serious problem for Christian churches as well, there's no outcry. One reason may be that some were complicit in these [abductions and confinements](#)."

On the leftward drift of churches, Pastor Ryuichi Sunagawa (砂川竜一) of *Tsukishiro Christ Church* (Nanjo City, Okinawa Prefecture) commented:

"Because pastors have long been told not to get involved in politics, they've come to swallow whatever the media and newspapers say without question."

He asserted that churches involved in [abductions and confinements](#) should apologize to the [Family Federation](#), saying,

"Only after that apology can Japan truly be restored."



Rev. Ryuichi Sunagawa,
13th May 2025. Photo:
[Yuya Kawase](#) (川瀬裕也)

Nakagawa told this paper that many Christians, even if they haven't spoken out, believe the [dissolution order](#) is wrong. Compared with right after the assassination, "the atmosphere has changed considerably," expressing hope.

One pastor said that attending the meeting was motivated by the belief that

"Remaining silent (about the [dissolution order](#)) is the same as participating in wrongdoing."

About the Japanese Christian opinion site [SALTY](#): Established in April 2018 as a space for Christian discourse. Born out of a sense of crisis regarding both society and the churches, it warns against the uncritical spread of Marxism and its ideology.

See also [Minister Reveals Crucial Facts to Court](#)

Featured image above: *Tsutomu Nishioka* (center) and *Haruhisa Nakagawa* (left) in discussion – 11th August 2025, *Ochanomizu Christian Center*, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo.

[Editor's note: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science ([Kōfuku no Kagaku](#)) and other newer religious movements.





Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of **Soka Gakkai**. Here students belonging to the faith in 2001. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#). Cropped

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to “rescue” the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about “mental health” or alleged “exploitation” as mitigating factors.]

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