

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Korean media speculates on FFWPU's role in 2022 Korean election

Knut Holdhus
August 22, 2025



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at a meeting at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., April 27, 2023



violation of election laws

Korea Herald echoes speculations by Christian media outlet that Federation campaigned for one of the presidential candidates in 2022 vote, in

See also [Religious Liberty Under Fire in South Korea](#)

On 20th August 2025, The Korea Herald reported allegations that the [Family Federation](#) engaged in illicit electoral activity during the 2022 South Korean presidential election, purportedly campaigning for then-candidate Yoon Suk-yeol. The article was headlined "[Unification Church campaigned for Yoon Suk Yeol in 2022 presidential election: report](#)".



According to the piece, the daily newspaper No Cut News (노컷뉴스) run by the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS), a religious radio and television network, claims that [Family Federation](#) branches gathered followers on 3rd March 2022 - just ahead of pre-voting - and encouraged them to support Yoon and to heed "the words of the heavens".



Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea 2017-2022

Additionally, [Hak Ja Han](#), the [Federation](#)'s co-founder and current leader, is said to have addressed high-level officials of the [religious organization](#) on 2nd March, criticizing then-President Moon Jae-in and invoking divine will in the election.

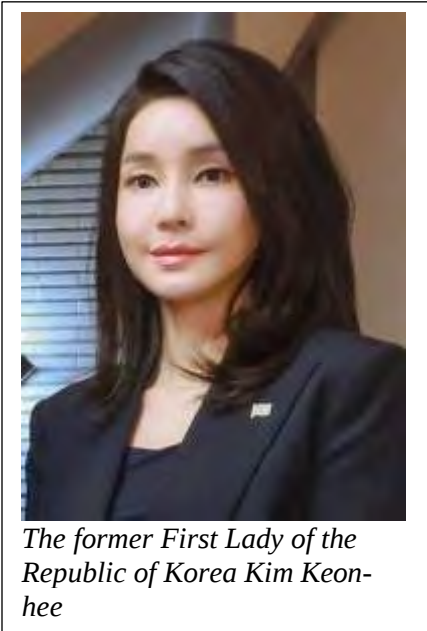
This, combined with reports that funds were funneled to [Federation](#) branches to assist Yoon's party, has prompted suspicions of a breach of Article 85 of the Public Official Election Act, which bans religious groups from using their influence to sway votes. The [Family Federation](#), however, denies any illegal support for specific individuals, acknowledging only that it did not sponsor "a certain individual" in an improper way. The article also notes allegations of luxury gifts - bags and a necklace - given to Yoon's wife.

The Korea Herald article by reporter Yoon Min-shik is almost entirely based on suspicions and allegations originating in a daily belonging to the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS), representing a Christianity that for more than 70 years has persecuted the [Family Federation](#).



CBS is not a neutral actor. Its Protestant identity and history of vocal opposition to the [Family Federation](#) / [Unification Church](#) color the credibility and framing of its reports. While this does not invalidate facts, it does raise questions about motive, timing, and emphasis.

By surfacing the allegations during an ongoing probe into Kim Keon-hee, CBS is both amplifying the legal stakes and reinforcing a longstanding narrative of the [Family Federation](#) and its political involvement.



The former First Lady of the Republic of Korea Kim Keon-hee

South Korean media is deeply polarized along political and religious lines. Conservative vs. progressive papers, and Protestant vs. new religious movement outlets, often report the same facts differently. This case illustrates how allegations about electioneering can double as instruments of religious competition.

Elections are of course important for the direction a nation chooses. Therefore, it is easy to understand that concerned religious leaders will always encourage adherents to choose political leaders who align with moral, faith-based principles. The reference to one who could "hear the words of the heavens" may well reflect a desire for righteous governance rather than explicit political endorsement.

The [Federation](#)'s statement that it "has not illegally sponsored a certain individual" suggests careful navigation within legal parameters. This phrasing acknowledges concern while not explicitly admitting wrongdoing.

In many societies, religious institutions have historically influenced civic life. Supporters may argue that encouraging morally aligned leadership is part of religious participation in societal well-being. This does not necessarily violate laws if done transparently and without undue coercion or financial manipulation.

At present, these remain allegations from media and the special counsel's ongoing probes - not legal findings. Supporters might stress the presumption of innocence and the need for robust evidence before drawing conclusions. The [Federation](#) has yet to be formally found in violation; investigations are ongoing.



Monthly Chosun

As for the allegations of the [religious organization](#) being involved in bribery involving the former First Lady Kim Keon-hee, another media outlet - the Monthly Chosun - has [effectively cleared](#) the [Family Federation](#) of involvement. The magazine writes that the alleged bribes from a former leader of the [Federation](#) are about individual overreach, not institutional corruption. See [Korean Bribery Scandal: Media Clears Federation](#)

The [Family Federation](#) has faced intense scrutiny - from raids to travel bans - amid broader corruption probes involving former South Korean President Yoon's inner circle and his wife, Kim Keon-hee. Critical voices perceive this as politically motivated targeting, given the [Federation](#)'s socio-political beliefs, rather than fair legal scrutiny. See [Korean Faith Crackdown: USA Urged to Confront It](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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Unification Church campaigned for Yoon Suk Yeol in 2022 presidential election: report

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Yoon Suk Yeol (Joint Press Corp.)

The Unification Church is suspected of illegally campaigning for Yoon Suk Yeol during the 2022 presidential election, a local media outlet reported Wednesday.

The accusations come amid the government's ongoing probe against the former president's wife and the controversial religious sect's alleged lobbying.

According to CBS No Cut News, branches of the Unification Church gathered their followers on March 3, 2022 — a day before the prevoting for the presidential election that Yoon won — and instructed them to vote for Yoon, then candidate of the conservative People Power Party.

The meeting supposedly carried messages that were against the Democratic Party of Korea, and messages that the next president should be one who could "hear the words of the heavens."

Han Hak-ja — the incumbent leader of the group and wife of the founding leader Moon Sun-myung — reportedly

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addressed high-ranking church officials in a Seoul hotel on March 2, 2022. In her speech, she was critical of then-incumbent President Moon Jae-in and claimed "the will of the heavens should be upheld in the presidential election."

It was reported last week that the special counsel team investigating former lady Kim Keon Hee found evidence suggesting that the Unification Church funneled substantial amounts of cash to its branches to support Yoon's party ahead of the 2022 election.

If the allegations are confirmed, the church would have violated the Public Official Election Act, which states in Article 85 that no one should use their position in a religious group to have members engage in an election campaign.

The church's official position is that it has not illegally sponsored a "certain individual," although it did not elaborate.

The Unification Church is also accused of gifting luxury bags and a necklace to Yoon's wife.

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According to South Korean monthly magazine, Yoon Young-ho’s involvement in the Kim Keon-hee bribery scandal is about individual overreach, not institutional corruption

The September 2025 issue of *Monthly Chosun* carries a provocative investigative feature on the recent scandal involving Yoon Young-ho (윤영호), former Director-General of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (FFWPU), the spiritual movement more widely known as the *Unification Church*. The article, titled “Yoon Young-ho, Geonjin Beonsa, and First Lady Kim Keon-hee Scandal”



The logo of the Monthly Chosun

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Young-ho, Jeonjin Beopsa, and First Lady Kim Keon-hee's scandal, weaves together threads of politics, religion, personal ambition, and foreign development aid. It suggests that Yoon, once a rising figure within the *Family Federation*, exploited his connections and reputation to pursue projects that blurred the line between private interest and public authority.

Yet while *Monthly Chosun* details the charges and suspicions surrounding Yoon, the *article* itself indirectly underscores an important truth: the scandal is less a reflection of the *Family Federation's* ethos than of one individual's overreach and ambition. The *article* certainly points to evidence not of systemic corruption within the *religious organization*, but of the need for discernment when charismatic individuals use their organizational ties to advance personal agendas.

Yoon's Rise and Fall



Young-ho Yoon at World Summit 2022 in Gapyeong, South Korea on 11th Feb. 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by *FFWPU*

Yoon's rapid rise is well documented. Born in 1977 into a devout Unificationist family, he was academically accomplished, pursuing graduate work in theology, Buddhism, and Confucian studies. By 2015, he was already serving in senior positions at the *Family Federation's* world headquarters and in the office of *Hak Ja Han*, the movement's leader. His diligence, organizational skill, and eloquence allowed him to ascend quickly; by 2020 he was effectively the No. 2 figure in the global *organization*, with his wife controlling finances.

The *Monthly Chosun* profile confirms both his strengths and his flaws. On one hand, colleagues praised his energy, polished appearance, and ability to organize large international events such as the World Summit. On the other, his tendency to exaggerate, centralize authority, and dismantle internal checks – such as the *Federation's* audit office – generated unease.

This duality is essential to understanding the scandal: Yoon was not an emissary faithfully carrying out the mission of the *Family Federation*, but rather a leader who increasingly acted independently, hoarding information, building his own networks, and eventually founding his own separate entity, the *GPD Forum*.

The Five "Solicitations"

The heart of the *Monthly Chosun* *article* is the list of five alleged favors Yoon sought in return for providing gifts, via fortune-teller Jeon Sung-bae (전성배 – "Geonjin Beopsa"), to First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희). These included lobbying for UN offices in Korea, acquiring the YTN television channel, invitations to presidential ceremonies, and ministerial attendance at church events.

However, the *article* itself demonstrates how implausible these supposed requests are as actual *Federation* objectives. The idea of hosting a UN Secretariat had already been publicly proposed by Rev. *Sun Myung Moon* in 2000 – hardly something to be achieved through backroom dealing two decades later. The YTN purchase, as the article notes, was attempted by a completely different organization (the *Global Peace Foundation* led by Hyun-jin Moon), not the *Family Federation*. And as *Monthly Chosun* admits, attending inaugurations or inviting ministers to events are trivial matters; thousands of minor figures and YouTubers attended the 2022 inauguration, and *Federation* events routinely feature high-profile global leaders without bribery.

In short, four of the five allegations collapse under scrutiny. What remains is the Cambodia ODA (Overseas Development Aid) matter – where Yoon clearly attempted to align his personal projects with



Involved in bribery scandal: Former South Korean First Lady *Kim Keon-hee*, here in Washington DC 10th July 2024. Photo: Jim Bourg/U.S. Department of State. *Public domain* image. Cropped

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more recently attempted to align his personal projects with government aid.

The Cambodia Question

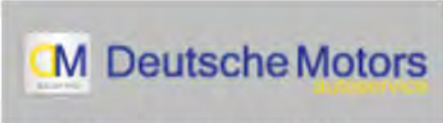
Here the [article](#) provides revealing detail. Yoon openly discussed his “Peace Park Project” along the Mekong River, including plans for a cable car in Phnom Penh. A businessman recalls that Yoon suggested ODA funds would cover the construction, implying connections with the presidential office.

Yet this was Yoon’s project, not the [Family Federation](#)’s. Cambodian officials themselves expressed skepticism, asking what role Yoon truly had within the Korean government. And when he was dismissed from the [Family Federation](#) in May 2023, all records of his Cambodia dealings left with him, indicating it was never an institutional initiative.

From the [Family Federation](#)’s perspective, this distinction is crucial. The movement has long supported humanitarian, educational, and peacebuilding work overseas. But Yoon’s Cambodia schemes – opaque, exaggerated, and centered on himself – fit a pattern of personal ambition rather than organizational mission.

Deutsche Motors and Rumors

The [article](#) also notes that *Deutsche Motors*, a company often mentioned in connection with First Lady Kim, acquired a Cambodian finance firm around the same period. Rumors circulated that Kim’s mother sought to exploit banking loopholes to divert funds. But here again, the [Family Federation](#) is not implicated; the connection is drawn only to highlight the broader political environment in which Yoon maneuvered.



Logo of Deutsche Motors, which is engaged in marketing imported automobiles in South Korea. The company is engaged in automobile sales, car parts sales, vehicle maintenance and repair, used car sales, brokerage, and auto finance services.

Yoon’s Independent Path

After his dismissal, Yoon founded the *GPD Forum*, carefully avoiding mention of the [Family Federation](#) and even disguising his name as “Daniel Yoon”. He rented offices, staged concerts with celebrities, and presented himself as a leader of a new organization. The similarity of the name “GPD” to “GPF” suggests deliberate imitation of the group of Hyun-jin Moon (문현진).

This is the strongest evidence that Yoon’s loyalty had shifted from the [Family Federation](#)’s mission to his own reputation and networks. It also explains why the [movement](#) distanced itself from him even before prosecutors intervened.

Scandal in Context



Symbol used by Seventh-day Adventist Church. [Public domain](#) image.

Finally, the *Monthly Chosun* [article](#) rightly notes that religious organizations are not immune to scandals when strong personalities misuse their positions. The Seventh-day Adventist Church faced such a crisis in the 1990s (the Robert Folkenberg scandal), and the

Orthodox Church in America (OCA) in 2005. Both overcame the challenge through transparency, decentralization, and reform.



Symbol used by International Orthodox Church in America (OCA). Image: Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

The [Family Federation](#), now in its 70th year, faces a similar moment. But the [article](#) itself shows that this is not a case of institutional corruption so much as the missteps of one ambitious man. Yoon used his position, exaggerated his influence, and then attempted to cloak his personal projects in the legitimacy of the [Federation](#). When he was removed, he struck out on his own, eventually entangling himself with political investigations.

Conclusion

For outside observers, the headlines may suggest a direct link between the [Family Federation](#) and corruption at the highest levels of Korean politics. Yet a close reading of the *Monthly Chosun* [article](#)

and even there, evidence points to Yoon acting alone, not on behalf of the religious organization.

The scandal demonstrates the Family Federation's resilience. It acted decisively in dismissing Yoon, it has not been shown to have sanctioned his dealings, and it continues to uphold its global mission of peace and family values. Like other religious movements that have weathered similar storms, it will emerge stronger through reaffirmed transparency and accountability.

In this light, the *Monthly Chosun* exposé, while sensational in its framing, ultimately highlights the separation between an ambitious individual and the enduring institution he once served.

Text: Knut Holdhus, written based on an English translation of the original article in Korean.

Featured image above: Young-ho Yoon, 5th December 2021. Screenshot from live transmission from an international rally by FFWPU. To the left, the *Monthly Chosun* logo.

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