

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Korea's Politicians Partisan View of Holy Mother Han

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[Mother Han](#) addressing a large prayer rally for the salvation of Korea and a unified Korean peninsula, January 9, 2022 in Cheonshim Peace World Center, Gapyeong, South Korea



[Segye Ilbo](#)

Amid South Korea's political polarization, media and authorities often view Mother Han through partisan lenses, despite her public mission extending far beyond politics

The South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#) published 25th November an opinion piece which in English would be titled "[President Hak Ja Han's path beyond political factions \[Religion Column\]](#)". The article written by religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (정성수) examines how political polarization in South Korea shapes public perceptions of religious figures - specifically [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) - by many referred to as [Mother Han](#) - the current leader and Co-Founder of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), also known as the [Unification Church](#).



Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)

See also [Mother Han: Prosecutors' Narrative Hard to Prove](#)

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The author argues that contemporary debates about [Mother Han's](#) political position, motives, and alleged misconduct risk collapsing a complex historical record into simplistic partisan narratives. For Western readers unfamiliar with South Korean political culture and the institutions referenced in the [article](#), several contextual elements are important to fully understand the author's point.

One of the central examples the [article](#) uses is the "Jeong Yun-hoe (정윤회) document" scandal of 2014. To appreciate its significance, one must recognize the institutional environment of South Korea at that time. South Korea's executive branch operates from the Blue House (Cheong Wa Dae), the former presidential office and residence analogous to the White House in the United States. Under then-President Park Geun-hye (박근혜), a conservative leader whose administration would later collapse amid a major corruption scandal, internal discipline and control within the Blue House were notoriously tight, and accusations of behind-the-scenes influence carried heavy political weight.

Against this backdrop, [Segye Ilbo](#) - a newspaper affiliated with the [Family Federation](#) - published a

leaked internal government document alleging that Jeong Yun-hoe (정윤회), a former aide to Park, was improperly exerting influence over state affairs through an informal network. In Western terms, this was akin to a major newspaper revealing that a personal friend of the president was secretly shaping governmental decision-making without holding any official position. The report ignited a political firestorm and placed the newspaper in direct confrontation with the highest levels of the sitting conservative government.



Park Geun-hye (President of South Korea 2013 - 2017) Photo (2013)

The significance of this episode in the [article](#)'s argument cannot be overstated. For critics who today portray [Mother Han](#) as having consistently aligned with or supported certain political factions, the 2014 report represents a counterexample that defies easy categorization. Rather than serving the interests of the ruling party, the [Family Federation](#)-aligned newspaper published an exposé that embarrassed and provoked the conservative administration, raising questions about internal power struggles and the abuse of state authority. According to contemporaneous reporting, [Mother Han](#) herself endorsed the newspaper's decision on the grounds that "the media must fulfill its public responsibility."

The Segye Ilbo [article](#) uses this history to challenge the notion that [Hak Ja Han](#) or the [Family Federation](#)'s institutions have operated merely as extensions of any political camp. The author suggests that [Mother Han](#)'s leadership has been motivated more by religious, ethical, and peace-oriented principles than by partisan objectives. Journalist Jeong Seong-su points to decades of initiatives pursued by the [Family Federation](#) - interfaith dialogue,

North-South Korean engagement, and international peace projects - to argue that such activities are not readily reducible to conventional left-right political metrics.



[Mother Han](#) motivated by religious, ethical, and peace-oriented principles rather than by politics. Here, speaking in Harare, Zimbabwe November 21, 2018

For Western readers, it is important to recognize that South Korea's political polarization is intense and often deeply personal. Allegations of political favoritism or ideological allegiance can become powerful rhetorical weapons. Religious movements, especially those as publicly visible as the [Family Federation](#), often find themselves scrutinized through the lens of political loyalty rather than through their broader civic or spiritual missions. The article therefore positions itself as a corrective to these tendencies, contending that one cannot fairly assess [Mother Han](#)'s past without situating it within the full complexity of South Korea's shifting political landscape.

The [article](#) also touches on the legal charges currently facing [Hak Ja Han](#), noting that any judgment on their validity should be determined through judicial processes rather than public speculation. While it refrains from discussing the specifics of the case, the author warns against reducing a leader's decades-long public activities to the narrow frame of contemporary legal disputes. This argument rests on a broader theme: that historical context and long-term patterns of action must be

evaluated alongside present controversies.

From a Western analytical standpoint, the article exemplifies a common tension in societies marked by deep partisan divides. Leaders - whether political, religious, or civic - are frequently assessed not on the full arc of their actions but on how they appear to align with the immediate concerns of the moment. The author pushes back against such reductionism, urging readers to examine the documentary record, to acknowledge episodes like the 2014 exposé that complicate easy narratives, and to judge [Mother Han](#)'s leadership in light of stated values such as public responsibility, interfaith collaboration, and peacebuilding.

Ultimately, the article is less a defense of [Mother Han](#) in a narrow sense and more an argument about how public memory and perception should operate in a polarized society. It urges a more nuanced and historically grounded approach - one that considers not only accusations or political climates, but also evidence, consistency of values, and the broader public impact of a leader's actions.

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religious matter, but a serious test of Korean democracy: in free societies, he says, *religious leaders are not arrested for their religious activities or how they run their church*. He describes the South Korean government's legal actions as a "direct infringement" on freedom of religion and conscience.

Newt Gingrich warns that state intervention into religious affairs risks shaking the foundations of Korean democracy and raises a "red flag" to U.S. leaders. He also contends that "selective justice" and the politicization of law enforcement threaten democratic legitimacy.

The former U.S. House Speaker emphasizes [Mother Han's](#) role in peacebuilding, noting her decades-long leadership, her global work to promote interfaith dialogue, and the [Family Federation's](#) public-interest initiatives: peace advocacy, cultural exchange, volunteer programs, and inter-Korean reconciliation efforts. While acknowledging that the [Federation](#) has faced controversy, he argues that "hastily labeling" it as a criminal group would be a "grave misjudgment".

Gingrich points out practical concerns: [Mother Han's](#) age (82) and the proportionality of detaining such an elderly religious figure. He urges that pre-trial detention should be a last resort, stressing humanitarian and societal consequences.

Newt Gingrich calls on Korean judicial authorities to withdraw excessive detention measures and release [Hak Ja Han](#) immediately, as she has not been convicted. He frames the issue as more than legal: it's a moral test of Korea's commitment to democratic values, religious liberty, and national dignity. He appeals directly to President Lee Jae-myung to "make the right decision".

Finally, Gingrich casts this as a matter of shared values: the U.S.-Korea alliance is not just strategic but bound by freedom. If South Korea sets a precedent of curbing religious freedom, he warns, it risks undermining those shared democratic ideals.

The economic newspaper [Chosun Biz](#) (조선비즈) reported on the ad extensively, summarizing Gingrich's key arguments: religious freedom, non-interference, the risk of politicized justice, and calls for [Mother Han's](#) release.



Other Korean outlets also covered the ad, highlighting Gingrich's concerns about state overreach and his framing of the case as more than a criminal investigation.



Logo of Ilyo Shimbun

The popular weekly newspaper [Ilyo Shinmun](#) (일요신문) published commentary from political pundits. Professor Shin Yul (Myeongji University) described Gingrich's ad as part of an "aftershock" following [Hak Ja Han's](#) detention. He noted that the [Family Federation](#) has many foreign followers and significant international influence, but argued that strong foreign

backlash (especially from U.S. conservative figures) could complicate the legal process.

Shin also warned of a "hot spot" in U.S.-Korea relations: the [Family Federation's](#) political connections and backing by high-profile U.S. conservatives could make the case a diplomatic vulnerability.

A column in the major economic daily [Aju News](#) argues that while American conservatives (like Gingrich and Trump) are raising the alarm about religious

freedom, Korean media and civic society should also reflect on the legitimacy of the investigations. The column suggests that these global conservative interventions might not just be about liberty – but also about political alliances and power.



Logo of the economic daily Aju News



According to the [Korea JoongAng Daily](#) on [5th September](#), Mike Pompeo, another high-profile U.S. conservative and former Secretary of State, previously condemned the special prosecutor's plans to summon



Attorney Kang Shin-eop of "Kang Shin-eop TV", one of Korea's most influential legal commentators, declared the ad a "bombshell." Screenshot from Attorney Kang's YouTube channel. [Link to his original video](#)

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Mike Pompeo, here on 13th February 2022. Screenshot from live transmission by PeaceTV.

Mother Han, calling such moves a betrayal of democratic principles.

On the conservative commentary front, prominent media personalities and lawyers with conservative audiences – for example, attorney Kang – Kang Shin-eop (강신업) – on his [YouTube/live channel](#) – discussed the ad and the legal/political questions surrounding the case; these segments generally echoed concerns about proportionality, the treatment of an elderly religious leader, and the international optics for Korea.



Ad on front page of the *Washington Times* 25th November 2025, protesting the long-term detention of Pastor Son Hyun-bo of the large Segyero Church and **Mother Han**. Ad sponsored by Coalition for Religious Freedom Korea.

In U.S.-based commentary (e.g., *The Washington Times*), Gingrich's stance is framed as part of a broader campaign: that protecting **Mother Han** is not only defending religious freedom but safeguarding an international movement for peace.

Some South Korean analysts express unease about foreign political involvement: that a U.S. politician publicly pressuring South Korea's judiciary could be perceived as interference in domestic affairs.

Others point to the possibility that this is not purely about religious rights, but also about power networks: the **Family Federation's** global reach, its ties to U.S. conservative politics, and potentially the use of Western political capital to defend its leader.

Gingrich's ad raises the stakes for U.S.-Korea relations by framing **Mother Han's** case as a values issue, not just a legal case. It suggests that religious freedom is part of the alliance, not separate from it.

For the South Korean government, responding to such public pressure from a prominent U.S. conservative could be tricky: pushing back may risk accusations of undermining religious liberty, while capitulating could be seen as yielding sovereignty to external actors.

The debate is reigniting broader discussions in Korea about the line between regular law enforcement and politicized justice. Gingrich's "selective justice" warning taps into domestic anxieties about whether legal processes are being used for political ends.

For the **Family Federation** and **Hak Ja Han**, the ad is not just a defense – it's a reaffirmation of their global legitimacy and mission. Support from figures like Gingrich and Pompeo bolsters their narrative of being persecuted for their beliefs and public good work.

See also [SKorea's Polarization Shapes Views of Mother Han](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Newt Gingrich. Photo (2016): Ali Shaker / VOA. **Public domain** image. Cropped. Above the image: The logos of the papers that carried the ad on 24th Nov. 2025. Besides the photo: The Korean ad and English translation of parts of it.

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